



THE
CAPTAIN'S YOUNGEST
PICCINO
AND
OTHER CHILD STORIES

FRANCES HODGSON
BURNETT

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THE CAPTAIN'S YOUNGEST



PICCINO

AND OTHER CHILD STORIES

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“‘Rabbett,’ he says, ‘my mamma is very pretty, isn’t she?’”—see page 8.

THE CAPTAIN'S YOUNGEST PICCINO

AND OTHER CHILD STORIES

BY
FRANCES HODGSON BURNETT

AUTHOR OF "LITTLE LORD FAUNTLEROY," "THAT LASS O' LOWRIE'S,"
"THE ONE I KNEW THE BEST OF ALL," ETC.



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THE CAPTAIN'S YOUNGEST

THE CAPTAIN'S YOUNGEST.



—♦—
HERE never were another like him, that's certain. I've seen a good many young gentlemen in my day, being in the army, and under officers as was what you may call swells, and had families of their own, some of them,

but I never saw a young gentleman as could hold a candle to Master Lionel; no, nor as were fit to black his boots, for the matter of that. And I knew him, too, from the time he were a young gentleman in long clothes, being carried about in his ayah's arms, and many's the time I've carried him myself, and been proud to do it. I had no children of my own, though I'd always been taken with them. I wasn't a married man, and knew I never should be, for that matter, after curly-headed little Maggie Shea died of the fever that blazing hot year when the disease was like a plague among us. She'd given me her promise only a week before; and I never saw the woman I wanted after her. Sometimes I've thought I was fonder of the

children because of it. She had been fond of them, and like a little mother she was to the seven that were sisters and brothers to her. And there was a sort of reason Master Lionel was more to me than the rest. I'd known his father, Captain Dalgetty, in his best days, when he first came out to India with his regiment at the time of the Mutiny, and won such a name by his dare-devil bravery and determination. That was before he offended his crusty old father by marrying pretty Miss Rosie Terence, the drunken old Irish major's daughter, who had nothing to her fortune but her dimples and her big blue eyes and black lashes, except the coaxing ways that drove the whole station wild with love for her. It *were* said as Miss Rosie's mother sent her out to her father to make a match, but if she did the old lady must have been terribly disappointed, because no sooner did the captain's father hear of the marriage than he sent for his lawyer, and sat down then and there and made a will cutting the poor fellow off with a shilling, and leaving all his money to hospitals and churches.

So the captain and Miss Rosie began life on love and short commons ; and, neither of them understanding economy, made a good many mistakes, as might have been expected. They didn't know how to contrive, and they got into debt, and when the children came and expenses grew heavier they lost spirit and patience, like a good many more, and let things go their own way. The captain lost his temper and the mistress grew careless and fretted, and when the

young master was born—the one as I'm telling about—things were about as bad and as comfortless as they could be. Not wishing to say a disrespectful word, or a harmful one, I *must* say as I'd even thought the captain were getting tired of his love-match, for he was aging uncommon fast, and his temper was getting uncommon sharp, and now and then Mrs. Dalgetty and him would have words as would end in him striding out of the bungalow, leaving her crying and worriting among the children. I can't say even as he were over fond of the children, or that they were over welcome when they came—six, girls, one after another—though they were pretty little things, all of them. But when Master Lionel were born it struck me as he *were* rather better pleased than he had been before, for he were the first boy.

Well I remember the day the captain came out of his quarters and told me about his having made his appearance rather unexpected.

I had been so long with them, and there were so many little things I could do as was a help, that I'd got into the way of doing them; and I happened this morning to be polishing about, and sees the captain coming out, looking half-way pleased with something or other; and when I drew myself up and saluted as usual, says he:

“Rabbett,” says he, “there's a change in the programme this time.”

I drops my swab in a minute and draws up and salutes again.

"What, sir?" says I. "Boy, sir?"

"Yes," says he. "Boy, and a fine little fellow too."

So in the course of the week I smartens myself up a bit more than common, in honour of the occasion, and goes into the house and gets the ayah to let me have a look at the young gentleman as he lay in his cradle in the nursery, next to the mistress's room. They was rather fond of me in that nursery, I may say, and it wasn't the first time I'd been there by many a one. But though I stepped light enough for fear of wakening the little fellow, somehow or other he did waken that very minute. As I bent over his cradle he opens his eyes, and he actually stares at me as if he was asking me a question or so. At least, it looked that way to me, and then, as sure as I'm a living man, he does something with his face as if he was doing his best to laugh; and when I laughs back and lifts his bit of a red hand, he opens it out and lets it lay on mine, quite friendly and sociable.

I won't say as he knew what he were doing, but I will say as he looked as if he did. And from that minute to the last hour of his life Master Lionel and me was friends fast and firm. Not being a family man, as I have said before, I took to him all the more, and I'm happy to say he did the same by me. When he got big enough to be carried out by his ayah I used to meet the woman, and take him off her hands whenever she would let me; which was often enough, because she knew both the captain and Mrs. Dalgetty knew I was safe to trust. I'd take him off into the shade and

walk about with him—him a-layin' his cheek against my red coat, sometimes laughing at the jokes I'd make with him, suiting them to his size, and sometimes a-staring up at me serious, but both of us always understanding each other and being cheerful, whatever was a-goin' on betwixt us. The fact was that I got that there used to him, with nursing him so much, that when he'd have a little choke or a disturbance of any kind, I got to be as handy as a woman about settling him and turning him over and patting his back, and though it may sound like a exaggeration to outsiders, I must say as I saw clear enough he had his own way of thanking me and showing me his gratitude for any small favours of the kind. Ay, and many an hour I've thought how it might have been if little Maggie Shea had got through that blazing summer—many and many an hour as I walked up and down, him nestling up against me as my own flesh and blood might have done, but never would.

So we began by being fond of one another, and we keeps on a-bein' fond of one another, and what's more, we gets fonder and fonder of each other as we grows older.

And such a boy as he were, and such ways as he had! There weren't no' end to him, he were that manly and handsome and well-grown and ready, by the time he were seven or eight year old. People as never looked at a child looked at him and was took by him, and the ladies at the station run wild about his beauty. Tall he was and well set up, and with a way of carrying himself a brigadier-general might

have been proud of. And a fine-cut face, and a big, brave black eye as looked at a man as if he was equal to leading a regiment; and yet was thoughtful and loving, and had a softness, too, when he was talking to a friend. And that quick he were to notice things as others of his age would never have seen. Why, he was only six years when one day, as he was standing by watching me at work, he looks up at me all at once and says he :

"Rabbett," he says, "my mamma is very pretty, isn't she?"

"Well," says I, "Master Lionel, I should say she *were*!"

"I thought so," he says; "I thought everybody must think she was pretty, just as I do, only I am very fond of her, you see." And he rather puzzles me by looking at me again in a wistful, questioning sort of way.

"Just so, Master Lionel," I answers, "just so, sir."

"Yes," he goes on, "I am very fond of her, and—and I suppose my papa is very fond of her too."

Being a trifle upset by this, I polished away at the captain's sabre for a minute or so, and even then I could only say :

"Yes, sir; nat'rally, sir, of course." For the truth were as things had been getting worse and worse, and the tiffs had been growing into rows—rows as couldn't go on without being heard in a bungalow, where walls was thin and rooms not over far from each other. And what he had heard the Lord only knows, but it had been a-workin' in his innercent mind and troubling him, and he was coming to me for

comfort, and that I saw in his fine, loving, wistful black eye, and in his handsome little chin, as was not quite steady.

"Yes, of course, he is very fond of her," he said, "and she is very fond of him ; because people who are married—people who are married always are, aren't they, Rabbett ? "

"Ah, sir," says I, "that they are ; there ain't nothin' like it."

"No," he says, his little face trying to keep itself steady, "and I'm very glad of—of that—I'm very glad of that." And quite sudden he faces round and walks off, a-holding his head up like a field officer. But well I knowed why he'd gone. Something had hurt his little heart and set him to thinking, so that he could not manage his looks even before Rabbett. And, gentleman as he was, he was not willing to let it be known what his child's trouble was.

When the family began to grow up the regiment was ordered back to England ; and I came back with them, you see. The captain was not rich, and as the family expenses got bigger, year by year, money got scarcer with him, and they couldn't live as they did before ; and so, somehow—I think it was because I liked the children, and especially my young master—I fell into a way of being part valet, part waiter, part man-of-all-work for the captain and his.

This wasn't all. The captain's fine way—for he was handsome still, and a gentleman born, and no mistake—brought him fine friends ; and his fine friends brought him debt, because he was obliged to keep up with them. Every-

thing was badly managed, because Mrs. Dalgetty, as I said, knew nothing about managing; so the servants ran wild, and were nothing but trouble and expense, and there were nothing but struggling to keep up, and threatening to break down, from day to day.

"The captain is worse than ever," Mrs. Dalgetty would say, sometimes, when things looked bad, and she had a crying fit on. "And Rose is so expensive, and the other girls are growing up. I wish Lionel was older. He is the only one who seems to feel for me at all."

The real truth were, as Lionel were that sweet-natured he felt for them all; and I must say as they couldn't help being as fond of him in their way as he was of them in his.

"Rabbett," says he to me once, when they was all going out—he was about nine years old then, or thereabout—"Rabbett, if you would like to see Rose before she goes, just stand in the passage when I go into the drawing-room with her cloak and handkerchief. She has just sent me for them."

Now my young master loved his mother dearly, but he loved Rose even better; he was allers talking to me of her beauty.

So says I, "I would like to see her." And he runs upstairs, quite pleased, and is down again in a minute.

I'll leave the door open," he says. And in he goes, with the cloak over his arm, and does leave it open, quite wide enough for me to see through.





"Miss Rose put her little hands on the shoulders of his jacket, and kissed him."

Miss Rose was standing by the fire, and beautiful she looked, in her grand evening dress, and so like what her mother had been that it gave me quite a start. There was a gentleman at her side, a-laughing and talking to her, and when Master Lionel goes in this party turns toward the door, to look at him, and I sees his face, and I gives a start again, for it were Captain Basil Roscoe.

Now I knew sum'at of Captain Basil Roscoe, you see, and that's what made me give a start. If ever there was a villain, and he to be called a gentleman, Captain Basil Roscoe were one. I knew things of him that he little guessed; we servants get to know many queer things. I felt, when I sees him, as if I saw a snake.

"Here comes the wrap," says Captain Basil, and he held out his hand, as if he meant to put it on for himself, but Miss Rose laughs and stops him.

"No," says she. "Lionel wouldn't like that. Would you, Lionel? He always puts my cloak on for me."

The captain drew back a bit, and gave the boy a sharp glance, but Miss Rose did not see it, for she was bending down to have the cloak put over her white shoulders, and Master Lionel was a-folding it around her, as pleased as could be, laughing, too, boy-like, but, for all that, doing it as deft and graceful as if he'd been born to it.

And then, when it was done, Miss Rose put her little hands on the shoulders of his jacket, and kissed him half-a-dozen times, so coaxing and merry and happy that I could

not bear to think the time would ever come when life would look harder to her than it did just then—going out to a grand ball, in a pretty dress, and with her lover by her side.

Unless it is true that the devil shrinks from and hates them as has no sins of their own, I should like to know why it was that Basil Roscoe were so ready in taking a dislike to an innocent-faced boy, as never harmed or differed with him ; for nothing is more certain than that from the first he did take a dislike to Master Lionel. It struck me, once or twice, as he not only couldn't bear the sight of him, but that, if he had had the chance, he would not have been sorry to do him a harm. His sneering manner showed it, and his ill-looking, handsome face showed it, apart from a hundred other bits of things. Master Lionel himself found it out soon enough.

“Rabbett,” says he, private and confidential, “he doesn't like me and I don't like him, and I wish he wasn't so fond of Rose. I never did him any harm, you know, Rabbett.”

Natural enough, his spirit is hurt about it, and he takes it a bit hard. But he never says much about it, until one night he comes to me, and I sees he is wonderful quiet, and after a while I made bold to ask what ails him. And the minute I asks him I sees, by the look in his eyes, that what ails him is something uncommon.

“It's something about Rose,” he says, “and it's something about Captain Roscoe”

A slight huskiness comes in my throat, as makes it necessary for me to clear it.

"Oh!" I says. "Indeed, sir?"

"Yes," he answers. "As I was coming here I passed him, standing at the corner of the street with a gentleman, and they were both talking aloud, Rabbett, and laughing. And they were talking about Rose."

Knowing the man so well, and having heard so much of his villany, my blood fairly boiled at the thought of what he might have been saying; but I made up my mind to speak quietly.

"Did you hear what they said, sir?" I asked. "Are you sure it was her they were speaking of?"

"Yes," says he, "sure, for I heard the gentleman say, 'What? Pretty Rose Dalgetty?' And then Roscoe answered, 'Even she might get tiresome.' And they both laughed. Rabbett"—and he turned his troubled, questioning boy's face to me, as if he was just awakening to some sort of bewildered fear, and wanted help—"what did he mean when he said she might get tiresome? And what made them laugh as they did? They were laughing at her—my sister Rose."

"No gentleman would have done it, sir," I answered, not knowing what else to say.

"I know that," he says. "But what did they mean? You are older than me, Rabbett, and perhaps you can understand more than that it was not what a gentleman would have done."

But of course I could not tell him that. If it meant

nothing worse, it at least did mean as Miss Rose's lover had so little respect for her that he could bandy her name among his companions with something like a sneer; so I tried my best to lead him away from the subject. If he'd been an ordinary kind of young gentleman, and he so very young yet, I might have managed it; but being the little fellow he was, the suspicion that his sister had been somewhat slighted stuck to him, and settled itself deep in his mind, and made him thoughtful beyond his years.

And this was far from being the end of it. Little by little I began to hear a whisper here and there, even among the men, about what people said of Captain Roscoe being so friendly with the Dalgettys, and partic'ler with Miss Rosie. There was not one of them but said that it would do the pretty young creature no good, if it did her no harm, to be so ready to let him be attentive. He had been such an open rascal in his time, and his character was so well known, that no careful mother would have let her daughter be seen with him, and he was only tolerated in his own set, and among those who were as bad as himself. But Mrs. Dalgetty was too thoughtless and indifferent to see the wrong in him, or to be troubled by what she heard, and the captain was rarely at home; so Miss Rose was left to herself, and, of course, did as any other innocent girl would have done, fell in love with a handsome face, and believed in it.

But at last so much was said by outsiders that something came to the captain's ears as must have roused him, for one

evening he comes up to the house in a towering rage, and shuts himself up with Miss Rose and her mother in the parlour, and has a tremendous row, and makes them both cry, and ends up by forbidding them to speak to Roscoe again.

But though Mrs. Dalgetty gave in, as she always did when the captain gave his orders, of course Miss Rose would not believe anything against her lover. Things had gone so far by that time that she would have stood out for him against the whole world; and as she dared not openly disobey her father, she fretted until she lost her pretty colour and bright spirits, and went about the house looking ill and wretched.

But the matter was not put an end to, as you may imagine. Once or twice, in going from the house to the barracks, I found Captain Basil Roscoe loitering about not far from the street's end, and more than once I could have sworn that I passed him at dusk with a familiar little figure clinging to his arm. And one night Miss Rosie calls her brother to her, as he was going out on an errand, and, as she bends over him in the doorway, slips a note into his hand, crying pitifully.

"You will take that for me, won't you, dear?" she says. "He is waiting in the square for it, and he does want it so—so much." And she kisses him, and gives a little sob and runs upstairs.

I don't think it could have been more than three minutes

after that when he comes to me, all pale and breathless with running, and lays that there note on the table.

"She wants me to take it to him, Rabbett," he says, "and she was crying when she asked me, and—what must we do?"

It is not to be expected as we two hadn't talked things over, being the friends we were. I got up and took the note from the table, making a resolution all of a sudden.

"If you'll stay here, sir," I said, "I'll take it myself."

And take it I did, and found the rascal waiting, as Miss Rose had said he would be. He gave a black enough scowl when he saw it were me, and it certainly didn't die out when I spoke to him.

"Sir," says I, "I've come here on a poor errand, and I've come unwilling enough, God knows. I've got a note in my hand here—a pitiful little letter from a trusting, innocent girl to a man who, if he does not mean her harm, surely cannot mean her good, or he would not be leading her to meet him, and write to him in underhand ways. And I've been making up my mind, as I came along, to make a appeal to that man, as surely he'll listen to if he has a man's heart in his breast. She is scarcely more than a child, sir, and she knows nothing of the world. Leave her alone, and she may be a happy woman; go on as you've begun, and it will be death and heartbreak to her, and her wrongs will lie at your door."

He stands there and looks at me, and by the light of the lamp we was standing under I sees his handsome, devilish

face, sneering and triumphing and scorning me, as if I was a worm in the dirt under his feet.

"My good fellow," he says, "you are a little too late. Hand me that letter, and be off, before I find it necessary to help you. How you got hold of the note I don't know, but I *do* know it was never given to you to deliver, and that I should be well warranted in kicking you back to your quarters, for your deuced impudence and presumption."

But I held to the letter tight.

"Very well, sir," I answers, respectful, but firm as a rock. "This letter goes back to the house, and before night is over the captain will have read it himself, and can judge for himself what is best——"

I didn't finish, for the next thing I knew was that he strode up to me and grasped hold of me by my collar, and the minute I saw what he meant to do I felt I had made a mistake in bringing the letter at all, and in fancying that any appeal could touch or move him. There was a struggle between us, but it did not last long; he being strong and lithe, and so much the younger man, gave me no chance; and it were scarcely three seconds before he threw me on the pavement, and leaving me there, a trifle stunned, walked off with the letter in his hand.

I knew things must be pretty bad then. He would never have been so desperate and determined if he had not meant to do his worst, and when I made my way back I felt sick with fear. Master Lionel was sitting by the bit of fire in the

grate when I opened the door, and he turns round and looks at me, and changes colour.

"Rabbett," he says, "there is blood on your face."

"Perhaps so, sir," I says. "I've had a fall."

And then I sits down and tells him all about it; about what I had meant to do, and what I had done, and I ends up by asking him what he thinks we had better do, now that my plans had failed.

"Master Lionel," I says, "it would seem a dreadful hard sort of thing to do, if we spoke to the captain."

He turns quite pale at the thought of it.

"Oh, no," he says, "Rabbett, I wouldn't do it. He would be so angry with Rose, and even with mamma. You remember my telling you what he said before."

I remembered well enough, and a pretty hard thing it was to say, even if it had been said in a passion, and not half meant. He had threatened to turn Miss Rose out of doors if she spoke to Roscoe again. He must have heard something bad enough, to have been so roused.

"Well," I ventures, "what can we do, sir?"

"Watch," says he. "I can think of nothing else to do just yet, Rabbett. I will watch Rose, and you shall watch Roscoe; and if the worst comes, and we must tell papa, we must. I suppose, Rabbett, that Roscoe will try to run away with Rose, as Farquhar ran away with that pretty Miss Lewis?"

"Yes, sir," I answers, "I'm afraid he will. But he is a

worse man than Farquhar ; and if Miss Rose goes away with him, I'm afraid he'll treat her hard enough when he tires of her, as such men as him always tires of young ladies."

"It would be better, Rabbett," says he, fixing his dark eyes solemnly on the fire, "it would be better that Rose should die. I know that."

"I am afeard, sir," says I, "that you are right."

God knows how he had learned to understand, but understand he did, and he were that sad and wise about it that my very heart ached. He had seen an old enough side of life, had Master Lionel, living among the set he did, but he were a young gentleman as nothing could spoil, his nature were that fine-grained.

We kept our watch faithful all that week and part of the next, but we found out very little, though we had our suspicions, Master Lionel and me, as things was going on pretty badly in a secret way. But at last the very worst thing as could have happened burst upon us all at once.

I was up at the house one evening, doing something or other for Mrs. Dalgetty, when of a sudden I heard a tremendous loud ring at the door-bell ; and, going in a hurry to answer it, the captain himself strode past me into the hall, all in a flame with the wine he had been drinking and the passion he were in. I had seen him in towering enough tempers often before, but I had never seen him look as he did then. It was my impression he were pretty near mad ;

indeed, I thought so then, and have thought so since. How could he have done what he did that night, unless he had not been quite himself?

"Rabbett," says he, "where's Miss Rose?"

"In her own room, sir," says I, wishing with all my heart that I could have told him she were not in.

"Rabbett," says he, "where's Mrs. Dalgetty?"

"In *her* own room," says I, "lying down, a-trying to get rid of a headache."

"Then," says he, "go and tell Miss Rose to come down to me at once."

I think I must have looked upset, myself, when I knocked at Miss Rose's door to deliver the captain's message, for the minute the words were out of my mouth she turned quite pale and scared-looking, and began to tremble.

"Oh, Rabbett," she says, the tears coming into her great, pretty dark eyes, "is anything the matter? does he look angry?"

"I must say, miss," I answers, "as he seems a bit more peppery than common, but I hope it's nothing much."

"Oh, Rabbett," she says, beginning to cry, and wringing her poor little helpless hands, "I know it is something dreadful. I daren't go down. I am so frightened."

But she were obliged to go down, and go down she did, a-trembling all over, and out-and-out faint with fear. She had always been a timid little affectionate creature, and the captain were pretty hard to face when his temper were up.

I am not ashamed to confess as I stayed as near within hearing distance as I could, without positively eavesdropping. I own up as I had my fears as to what the end of it all would be, knowing the captain were drove too wild to be wise, or even reasonable, and I wanted to be near enough to see Miss Rose when she came out of the room, and say a comforting word to her, if she seemed to need one.

But she came out of the room in a different manner to what even I had expected. The minute she went in I heard the sound of Mrs. Dalgetty crying and the captain storming, and for a quarter of an hour after the storm fairly raged. The captain stamped and swore, Mrs. Dalgetty sobbed, and tried to put in a word now and then, but Miss Rose seemed to be too much stunned to speak. I never heard her voice after the first few moments, and at last the door opened again, and she came running out, her beautiful dark eyes wide open, her innocent face as white as death. She did not see me, but ran past where I stood, up to her own bedroom, and there was that in her look as brought my heart into my mouth, and, queer as it may seem to you, the first thing I thought of was Master Lionel.

"There's harm been done," says I to myself, "deadly harm, and no one can undo it but one as loves her, and that she's fond of herself in her girl's way; the one as she needs now is that there fine little fellow as was almost like a little lover to her."

And when she came down I feels surer of it than ever;

for in three minutes more she did come down, with her hat and jacket on, ready to go out. And her face was even whiter than before; and when she sees me, she holds out her hand, her eyes looking big and bright with a dangerous sort of shine.

"Good-bye, Rabbett," she says. "I am going."

"Miss Rose," says I, "where are you going to?"

Then she smiles sad and bitter, and a bit hard.

"Ask papa," she answers. "He ought to know. He sent me away. I don't exactly know myself, unless—unless one person in the world loves me well enough to take me."

"Miss Rose," I breaks out, "for God's sake don't go to Basil Roscoe!"

She dragged her hand away from mine, and her eyes flashed fire.

"You all hate him!" she cried; "but I have chosen him before all the world. Papa said I must choose, and I have chosen. I am going to Basil Roscoe!"

And before I could speak another word she had darted out of the door, all on fire, and desperate, as one might say, and was gone.

I knew it would be of no use speaking to the captain. Since he had as good as turned the poor innocent creature out of house and home, he was not the one to go to for help. When he was cooler he would see his mistake, and repent it bitter enough; but just now to go to him would only make him madder than ever.

Well, just at that very minute in come Master Lionel. There might have been some sort of a fate in it. He jumps up them stone steps two at a time, and bangs at that open front door, clean out of breath, and looking wonderful like his sister, in his excitement.

"Where's Rose gone to, Rabbett?" he says. "I have just seen her walking fast—almost running—down the street, and she would not stop for me. What has been the matter?"

I ups and tells him. I weren't afeard of doing it. I knew him to be that there ready and brave and affectionate.

"Rabbett," he said, in a jiffy, "come along with me."

"Master Lionel," I asks, "where to?" For the fact were my head weren't as clear as his, and I were a bit bothered as to what would be the best thing to be done first.

"I am going to Captain Roscoe's lodgings," he answers, as steady as you please.

And so, if you'll believe me, off we goes, out into the street, him a-keeping step beautiful, as he always did, but not saying a word until at last I speak to him.

"Master Lionel," I says, "what are you thinking about?"

"I am thinking," he answers, his dark eyes shining, "about what I am going to say to Roscoe."

But it weren't so easy to find Roscoe. We did not know exactly where his lodgings were, and so we had to inquire in first one place and then another. The people we fancied could tell us knew nothing definite, when we went to them; and when we got the name of the street it were hard to

find. But we did find it at last, after a great deal of trouble and a great deal of delay, which was worse. The delay was what upset us, for both of us felt pretty certain that Captain Basil Roscoe would lose very little time in getting Miss Rose away out of the reach of her friends, if he once found her willing to go with him.

By the time we reached the end of the street where he lived Master Lionel were that worked up and excited that he was growing paler and paler, and his eyes were like lanterns in his face, and he caught hold of my hand and held it hard and fast.

"Rabbett," he says, "what if we should be too late?"

"I can't think such bad luck could happen to us, sir," I answers him back.

And then it were—just at that instant—as his sharp young eyes spied something out ahead of us, for he drew his hand away, and started running, just throwing back a word or so to me.

"There's a carriage before the door," he said, "and they are getting into it."

He were up that street like a deer, and in half a minute I were with him; but when I comes up, all out of breath, he were on the carriage-step, holding the door open; and, what's more, holding at bay the black rascal who stood near, sneering and raging at him by turns. "Rabbett," he cries out, "help me to hold the door open. No—go to the horses' heads. Now, Rose, get out."

I went to the horses' heads, as I would have done if the captain himself had given the order, instead of "The Captain's Youngest." It made my heart ache, too, to hear the ring in the little chap's voice, so like his father's, and then to remember what the captain might have been—and what he were. Even the driver were struck all of a heap by the youngster's pluck, and were so busy looking at him that he let me take my stand, without a word against it.

"Look here, mate," he says to me, "here's a rum go!"

"It's bad enough," says I. "Perhaps you'll oblige me with them reins?"

"If you don't come down from that step," says Roscoe, saying every word slow, as if he was trying to hold himself back from striking the boy a blow as would kill him, "you impudent young devil, I will take the whip from the box there and cut you to pieces!"

Then Miss Rose bends forward. It is my impression as the cruel, murderous sound in the fellow's voice was something she had never heard before, and it frightened her.

"Don't speak to him in that way, Basil," she says. "Oh, Lionel, dear, you shouldn't have come. You must go back. You must, indeed. I shall never come home again, Lionel." And she burst out crying.

"I shall go back, Rose," says the boy, "but you must come with me. Rabbett and I came to fetch you, and we shall not leave you." And then he looks at Roscoe square. "I am not afraid of your cutting me to pieces

with your whip, sir," he says. "Rabbett will see to that. But," and the fire blazed up in his voice and his face and his eyes, as grand as if he had been the captain himself, "if I had come alone I would not have left this carriage door unless Rose had come with me, You might have used your whip, but you couldn't have made me do that."

"Am I," says Roscoe, panting with the passion he dare not let out, "am I to throw you into the street under the horses' hoofs, you impudent young devil?"

But Master Lionel's back was turned to him. He was pleading with his sister.

"Rose, dear," he says, "come home with me. You will come home with me, I know." And he caught hold of her hand.

God knows how it all happened—I don't. If I had only been quick enough to see in time, the captain's youngest might have been alive this day, a brave young fellow, such as the captain had been in those first days in India—a brave, handsome young soldier, as would have been a honour to his country, and a stanch friend yet to me.

But that weren't to be. Just as he stood there, his foot on the carriage-step, a-holding his sister's hand, the passion in the heart of the rascal watching him broke forth. He caught him by the shoulder, there were a short struggle as the boy tried to free himself, and before I could reach them he had whirled him away from the door—with

greater force than he intended, I've tried to believe. The frightened horses lashed out their hoofs and sprang forward, struggling over the child's very body, as he lay stunned under their feet.

Scoundrel as he was, I never could make it look square to myself as the man meant the harm he did. His face was out-and-out deathly, as he leaped forward to save him as quick as I did myself. But we were both too late. We could only drag at the reins, and stop the horses in time to prevent the wheels passing over him—that were all.

We had him out in a minute, and Miss Rose was out of the carriage, kneeling on the pavement by him, and the driver was down off his box.

"Great God!" says Roscoe, "I never meant to do him such a harm. He's dead!" And he shuddered all over, with fear, perhaps, as much as anything else.

But he weren't dead, and he hadn't even fainted, though he were stunned at first. I had lifted him in my arms, and he lay against me, panting a bit, and stone-white, all but for a stain of blood on one temple. It weren't his head as was so badly hurt, it were his side, where one of the horses had lashed out and struck him. And as sure as I'm a living man, in a few minutes he opens his eyes and lays hold of his sister's hand.

"Rose," he says, "will you—go home—with me—now?"

She knelt over him, wringing her hands, and sobbing as if her heart would break. She would not let her lover

come near her. When he tried to speak, she shrank away, shuddering.

It's my belief as what she had seen in his face during the last ten minutes would have broke her faith in him, even if the young master had met no hurt. And now she were that terrified that she were as helpless as a child.

"Is he much hurt?" she kept saying. "Rabbett, oh, Rabbett! let me take him home to mamma. Put him into the carriage." And then she turned upon Roscoe, fierce and wild. "Go away," she cried out. "You have killed him! Go away, and never let me see you again!"

There were a dreadful house when we took him home. Mrs. Dalgetty went out of one faint into another, as she always did when she was frightened. The servants ran backward and forward, doing nothing, the children crowded round us, crying, and the captain looked on at all we did like a man in a dream.

He were hurt and bruised and broken that bad—poor little fellow!—that when the doctor came, and were beginning to go to work on him, he looks up at me with his bright, troubled eye, and says to me:

"Rabbett, please take hold of my hand."

I were that near breaking down and sobbing out loud that I were ashamed of myself. It were a comfort to me, in many a day after, to think I had took hold of his hand, and that he had asked me to do it.

And when the hard job was over, the doctor put his hands into his coat-pockets, and stands looking at him for a minute or so, and then he turns to me and beckons me out of the room.

"Sir," I ventured to say, "Master Lionel—will he——" But I could not finish, somehow. I meant to say, "Will he get over it?"

"No," says he. "I am very sorry to say it; but he will not."

Will you believe me as the words struck me like a slung-shot. Not having no family of my own, and never having clung to nothing on earth as I had clung to that there generous, neglected little fellow, just at that minute I felt as if I'd got a blow as was too hard to stand up against. I couldn't face it straight. When I had been lonely in my way he had been lonely in his, and we had been a help and a comfort to each other in ways as outsiders never understood.

"Sir," I puts it to him, quite hoarse when I gets my voice back, "when——" And I couldn't finish that question neither.

"Well," he answers me back, "I am afraid before morning.'

I went back to the room and stayed there all night.

It seemed a strange sort of thing that at the very last him and me was together alone, as we always had seemed

to be. He had coaxed Miss Rose to go to bed ; he would not rest until she went ; and when she bent down to kiss him he says to her, in a whisper, quite bright and cheerful : " Don't cry, Rose. It's all right."

And then the captain gets tired, and begins to doze, and Mrs. Dalgetty falls asleep on the sofa ; and so Master Lionel and me was left together ; me watching him, and listening to the clock ticking ; him lying quiet, with his eyes shut.

But toward daybreak he gets a bit restless, and stirs, and the next thing I sees him looking at me, quite wide awake.

" Rabbett," says he, in a bit of a hurry, " open the window."

And when I goes and does it, and comes back, he puts out his hand.

" Rabbett," he says, " I'm very fond of you ;" and something wistful comes into his eyes, and I sees a faint gray shadow creeping up over his face. " I was always fond of you, and I always shall be fond of you," says he. " Don't let my hand go, Rabbett."

And the next minute the gray shadow has changed his brave, handsome, childish face all at once and altogether. He gives me a innercent, bright look—just one, as if he were wondering why I shook so—and shuts his eyes. He would never open them again on me, as was so fond and proud of him in my poor way. When they opened again

he would see something brighter than the morning sky, as was just growing red and golden before the east window.

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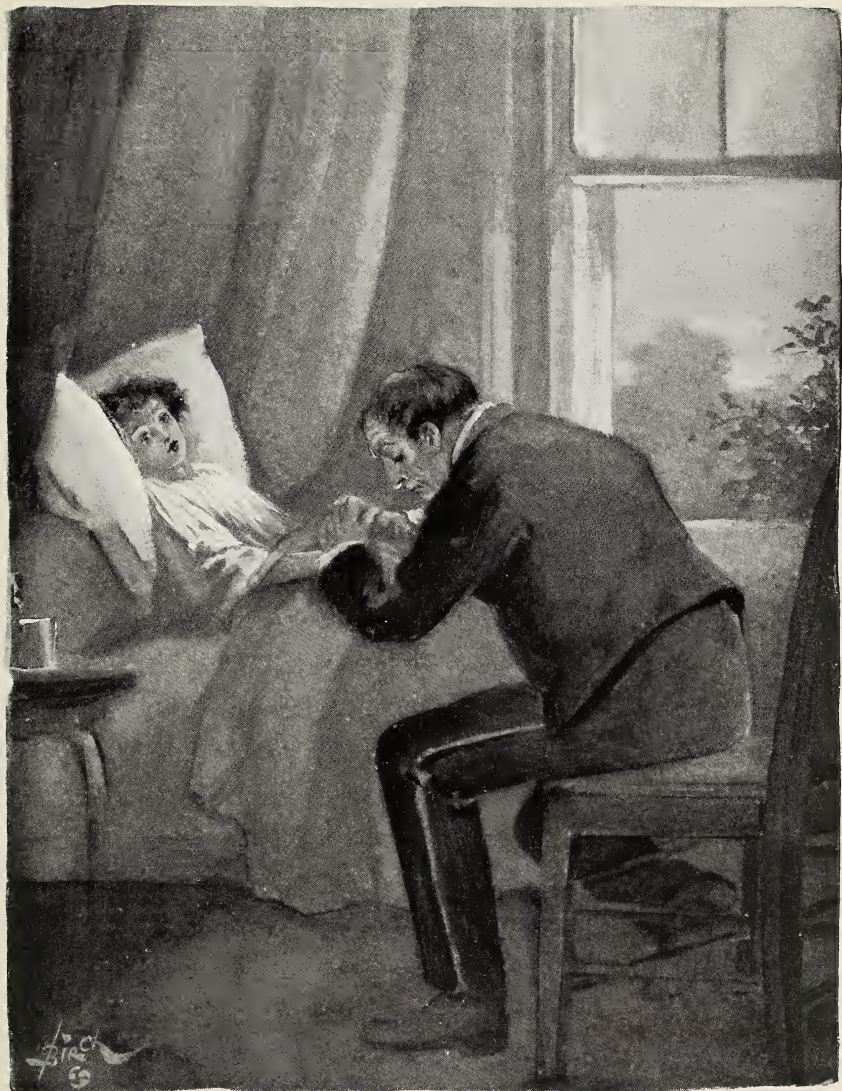
Of course they fretted over him for a while, finding out most likely as he'd made himself dearer than they'd thought before he were gone. They could not have helped missing him if they had been more careless than they were. Sometimes I fancied the captain was checked a bit and sad, and blamed himself in secret, but his days of being open and soft-hearted was over, and it were hard to tell. I know it was a long time before he forgave Miss Rosie, though for her sake the matter was hushed up, and no one but themselves knew exactly how the accident happened. Miss Rose could never bear the sound of Basil Roscoe's name again, and she married a good man a few years after, and made him a good wife. So the poor little fellow as gave his life for her did not lose it for nothing, though, if you were to ask me which of the two—but, there, it's not for me to take on myself to argue out! But he were only a boy to them—only a child. They didn't know him as I did, and so after a while their grief died out, and in a year or so he was half forgotten.

But it weren't so easy for me. His handsome little face and his pleasant ways is as clear to me to-day as they ever was. When I sit lonely over my fire of a winter's night—and I am a lonely man, things being as they are

and the years going on—I think of him for hours in a way of my own, and make a sort of dream of him. I think of him as he lay in his cradle and we made friends when he wasn't but a week old. I think of him as he was, with his little soldier ways about the quarters, carrying himself as military as if he'd been twenty; a-helping me in one way and another, and finding out he might be confidential, though I wasn't nothing but a private and him a officer's son. I think about him as he looked when he came to me in his innercent trouble that night and told me about his sister's lover. And then I see him lying there, with the light from the east window falling on him, and I hear him saying :

“I am very fond of you, Rabbett. I always was fond of you, and I always shall be fond of you. Don't let my hand go, Rabbett.”

Ay—and that ain't all. I make a picture of what might have been. I sees him grown into a young man—a handsome, smart young officer—and make a picture of some beautiful young girl, and tells myself what a pretty love story they would have had betwixt them, and what a lover, and what a young husband he would have been! Why, there's been nights when I've even seen little children like him, and thought they would have been fond of me, as he was. It's made me forget where I was, and when I'd be roused up by something or other I've found myself choke up with something as might almost have



"I am very fond of you, Rabbett."—page 32.

been my heart in my throat, to think as it were only a sort of dream after all. And the captain's youngest lies out under the stars in the churchyard, the wind a-blowing over the snow as lies on a grave as is only the grave of a child.



TWO DAYS IN THE LIFE OF PICCINO



"Many a day he had fallen asleep with his curly head on its warm little fuzzy side."—see page 45.

TWO DAYS

IN

THE LIFE OF PICCINO.



IF he lived a hundred years—to be as old as Giuseppe, who was little Roberto's great-grandfather, and could only move when he was helped, and sat in the sun and played with bits of string—if he lived to be as old as that, he could never forget them — those two strange and dreadful days.

When sometimes he spoke of them to such of his playmates as were older than himself—especially to Carlo, who tended sheep and was afraid of nothing, even making jokes about the *forestieri*, they said they thought he had been foolish—that as it seemed that the people had been ready to give him anything, it could not have been so bad but one could have tried to bear it, though they all agreed that it was dreadful about the water.

It is true, too, that as he grew older himself, after his mother died and his father married again the big Paula, who flew into such rages and beat him—and when he had to tend sheep and goats himself and stay out on the hills all day in such ragged jackets and with so little food because Paula said he had not earned his salt, and she had her own children to feed, then he longed for some of the food he would not eat during those two days, and wondered if he would do quite the same thing again under the same circumstances. But this was only when he was very hungry and the mistral was blowing, and the Mediterranean looked grey instead of blue.

He was such a tiny fellow when it happened. He was not yet six years old, and when a child is under six he has not reached the age when human creatures have begun to face life for themselves altogether, and even a little Italian peasant who tumbles about among sheep and donkeys, which form part of his domestic circle, is still in a measure a sort of baby whose mother or brother or sister has to keep an occasional eye on him to see that he does not kill himself. And then also Piccino had been regarded by his family as a sort of capital, and had consequently had more attention paid to him than he would have had under ordinary circumstances.

It was like this. He was so pretty—so wonderfully pretty. His brothers and sisters were not beauties, but he was a beauty from his first day, and with every day

that passed he grew prettier. When he was so tiny that he was packed about like a bundle wound up in unattractive looking bandages, he had already begun to show what his eyes were going to be—his immense soft black eyes with lashes which promised to be velvet fringes. And as soon as his hair began to show itself it was lovely silk, which lay in rings one over the other on his beautiful little round head. Then his soft cheeks and chin were of exquisite roundness, and in each he had a deep dimple which came and went as he laughed.

He was always being looked at and praised. A "Gesù Bambino" the peasant women called him. That was what they always said when a child had wonderful beauty—their idea of supreme child loveliness being founded on the pictures and waxen richly-dressed figures they saw in the churches.

But it was the *forestieri* who admired him most, and that was why he was so valuable. His family lived near a strange little old city in the hills which spread out behind one of the fashionable seaside towns on the Italian Riviera. The strange little old city, which was a relic of centuries gone by, was one of the places the rich foreigners made excursions to see. It was a two or three hours' drive from the fashionable resort, and these gay rich people, who seemed to do nothing but enjoy themselves, used to form parties and drive in carriages up the road which wound its way up from the shore through the olive vineyards and back into the hills. It was their habit to bring servants with them and hampers

of wonderful things to eat, which would be unpacked by the servants and spread on white cloths on the grass in some spot shaded by the trees. Then they would eat, and drink wine, and laugh, and afterwards wander about and explore the old city of Ceriani, and seem to find the queer houses and the inhabitants and everything about it interesting.

To the children of Ceriani and its outskirts these excursion parties were delightful festivities. When they heard of the approach of one they gathered themselves together and went forth to search for its encampment. When they had found it they calmly seated themselves in rows quite near and watched it as if it were a kind of theatrical entertainment to which they had paid for admission. They were all accomplished in the art of begging, and knew that the *forestieri* always had plenty of small change, and would give, either through good nature or to avoid being annoyed. Then they knew from experience that the things that were not eaten were never repacked into the hampers if there was someone to ask for them. So they kept their places quite cheerfully and looked on at the festivities, and talked to each other and showed their white teeth in generous grins, quite amiably sure of reaping a pleasant harvest before the carriages drove back again down the winding road ending at the sea and San Remo, and the white many-balconied hotels.

And it was through these excursion parties that Piccino's

market value was discovered. When he was a baby and his sister Maria, who was his small nurse—being determined not to be left behind by her comrades, toiled after the rest of the children with her little burden in her arms or over her shoulder—it was observed that the *forestieri* always saw the pretty round black baby head and big soft dark eyes before they saw anything else, and their attention once being attracted by Piccino very pleasant things were often the result. The whole party got more cakes and sandwiches and legs of chickens and backs of little birds, and when bits of silver were given to Maria for Piccino, Maria herself sometimes even had whole francs given to her because it was she who was his sister and took care of him. And then having begun giving, the good-natured ones among the party of ladies and gentlemen did not like to quite neglect the other children, and so scattered *soldi* among them, so that sometimes they all returned to Ceriani feeling that they had done a good day's work. Their idea of a good day's work was one when they had not run after carriages for nothing, or had heads shaken at them when they held out their hands and called imploringly, "Uno soldino, bella Signora—bella Signora!" Piccino had been born one of the class which in its childhood, and often even later, never fails in the belief that the English and Americans who come to the beautiful Riviera come there to be begged from, or in some way beguiled out of their small coin.

Maria was a sharp child. She had not lugged her little brothers and sisters about all through the working time of her twelve years without learning a few things. She very soon found out what it was that brought in the *soldi* and the nice scraps from the hampers.

"It is Piccino they give things to, Ecco," she said. "They see his eyes and they want to look at him and touch his cheeks. They like to see the dimples come when he laughs. They would not look at me like that—or at you, Carmela. They would not come near us."

This was quite true. The row of little spectators watching the picnics might be picturesque, but it was exceedingly dirty, and not made of the material it is quite safe to come near. It was a belief current among the parties who drove up from San Remo that soap had never been heard of in the vicinity of Ceriani, and that water was avoided as a poisonous element, and this belief was not founded upon mere nothings.

"They are as dirty as they are cheerful and impudent," someone had said, "and that is saying a great deal. I wonder what would happen if one of them were caught and washed all over?"

Nobody could have been dirtier than Piccino was. Pretty as he looked, there were days when the most enthusiastic of the ladies dare not have taken him in her arms. In fact there were very few days when anyone would have liked to go quite that far—or any farther indeed than looking at

his velvet eyes and throwing him *soldi* and cakes. But his eyes always won him the *soldi* and cakes, and the older he grew the more he gained, so that not only Maria and her companions but his mother herself began to look upon him as a source of revenue.

"If he can only sing when he grows a little older," his mother said, "he can fill his pockets full by going and singing before the hotels and in the gardens of the villas. Everyone will give him something. They are a queer lot these foreigners, who are willing to give good money to a child because he has long eyelashes. His are long enough, thanks to the Virgin. Sometimes I wonder they are not in his way."

His mother was the poorest of the poor. She had seven children and a mere hovel to put them in, and nothing to feed and clothe them with. Her husband was a good-for-nothing who never worked if he could help it, and who, if he earned a few *soldi*, got rid of them at once before they could be scolded out of him and spent on such extravagances as food and fire. If Piccino had not been a little Italian peasant he would no doubt have starved to death or died of cold long before he had his adventure, but on the Riviera the sun shines and the air is soft, and people seem born with a sort of gay carelessness of most things that trouble the serious world.

As for Piccino he was as happy as a soft little rabbit or a young bird, or a baby fawn. When he was old enough to run

about he had the most beautiful days. They seemed to him to be made up of warm sunshine and warm grass, flowers looking at him as he toddled round, light filtering through vines and the branches of olive trees, nice black bread and figs, which he lay on his back and munched delightedly, and days when Maria dragged him along the road to some green place where grand people sat and ate good things, and who afterwards gave him cakes and delicious little bones and *soldi*, saying over and over again to each other that he was the prettiest little boy they had ever seen, and had the most beautiful eyes and—oh! his eyelashes!

“Look at his eyelashes!” they would exclaim. “They are as thick as rushes round a pool, and they must be half an inch long.”

Sometimes Piccino got rather tired of his eyelashes and wore a resigned expression, but he was little Italian enough to feel that they must be rather a good thing as they brought such luck. Once, indeed, a man came all by himself to Ceriani and persuaded his mother to make him sit on a stone while he put him in a picture, and when it was over he gave his mother several francs, and she was delighted, but Piccino was not so pleased, because he had thought it rather tiresome to sit so long on one stone.

This was the year before the dreadful two days came.

When they came he had been put into queer little trousers which were much too big for him. One of his brothers had outgrown them and given them good wear. They were, in



"He went and showed them to the donkey."—page 45.

fact, as ragged as they were big, and as dirty as they were ragged, but Piccino was very proud of them. He went and showed them to the donkey, whose tumble-down sleeping apartment was next to his own, and who was his favourite playmate and companion. It was such a little donkey, but such a good one. It could carry a burden almost as big as its stable, and it had soft furry ears and soft furry sides, and eyes and eyelashes as pretty for a donkey as Piccino's were for a boy. It was nearly always at work, but when it was at home Piccino was nearly always with it. On wet and cold days he stayed with it in its tiny broken stable playing and talking to it, and many a day he had fallen asleep with his curly head on its warm little fuzzy side. When it was fine they strolled about together and were companions, the donkey cropping the grass and Piccino pretending it was a little flock of sheep, and that he was big enough to be a shepherd. In the middle of the night he used to like to waken and hear it move and make little sounds. It was so close to him that he felt as if they slept together.

So he went to show it his trousers, of course.

"Now I am a man," he said, and he stood close by its head, and the two pairs of lustrous eyes looked affectionately into each other.

After that they sauntered out together into the beautiful early morning. When Piccino was with the donkey his mother and Maria knew he was quite safe, and so was

the donkey, so they were allowed to ramble about. They never went far, it is true. Piccino was too little, and besides there were such nice little rambles quite near. This time was the loveliest of all the year. The sun was sweetly warm, but not hot, and there were anemones and flaming wild tulips in the grass.

Piccino did not know how long they were out together before Maria came to find them. The donkey had a beautiful breakfast, and Piccino ate his piece of black bread without anything to add to its flavour, because his mother was at the time in great trouble and very poor, and there was scarcely the bread itself to eat. Piccino toddled along quite peacefully, however, and when he came upon a space where there were red and yellow tulips swaying in the soft air he broke off a fine handful, and when the donkey lay down he sat by it and began to stick the beautiful flaring things round his hat as he had seen Maria stick things round hers. It was a torn soft felt hat, with a pointed crown and a broad rim, and when he put it on again with its adornment of red and yellow flowers sticking up and down and falling on his soft, thick curls, he was a strangely beautiful little thing to see, and so like a picture that he scarcely seemed like a real child at all, but like a lovely fantastic little being some artist had arranged to put on canvas.

He was sitting in this way looking out to where he

could see a bit of blue sea through a break in the hills, when Maria came running towards him.

"The donkey!" she cried, "the donkey!"

She had been crying, and looked excited, and took him by the hand, dragging him towards home. His legs were so short and he was so little that it always seemed as if she dragged him. She was an excitable child, and always went fast when she had an object in view. Piccino was used to excitement. They all shouted and screamed and gesticulated at each other when any trifling thing happened. His mother and her neighbours were given to tears and cries and loud ejaculations upon the slightest provocation, as all Italian peasants are, so he saw nothing unusual in Maria's coming upon him like a whirlwind and exclaiming disjointedly with tears. He wondered, however, what the donkey could have to do with it, and evidently the donkey wondered too, for she got up and trotted after them down the road.

But when they reached the house it was very plain that the thing which had occurred was not a trifle or usual.

Piccino saw an old man standing before the door talking to his mother. At least he was trying to get in a word edgeways now and then, while the mother wept and beat her breast and poured forth a torrent of bemoaning, mingled with an avalanche of scolding addressed to her husband, who stood near her looking at once sheepish and ill-tempered.

“Worthless brute and pig,” she proclaimed; “idle, wicked animal who will not work to help me to feed his children. It is only I who work and the donkey who helps me. Without her we should starve—starve! And he sells her—poor beast—sells her to get money for his wickedness and gluttony! And I am to starve without her. A fine thing—and he brings to my door the thief he has sold her to!”

Baby as he was, Piccino began to understand. His father had sold the donkey and it would be taken away. He lifted up his voice in a wail of bitter lamentation, and breaking away from Maria, ran to the donkey and clung round her front leg, rubbing his cheek wofully against her grey shoulder.

For an hour or so they all wept and lamented, while their mother alternately wept and raved. She abused her husband, and the old man who had bought the donkey, by turns. Stray neighbours dropped in and helped her. They all agreed that old Beppo was a usurer and a thief, who had somehow got the better of Annibale, who was also a drunken shameless brute. Old Beppo was so overwhelmed by the storm of hard words and bad names raging about him that he actually was stunned into allowing that the donkey should remain where she was for two days, that she might finish some work her mistress had promised to do with her aid. And he went away grumbling with his piece of rope over his arm.



"He . . . ran to the donkey and clung to her front leg."—page 48.

There was nothing to eat in the house, and if there had been the mother was too prostrate with grief and rage to have prepared anything like a meal. And so it seemed a great piece of good luck when dirty little Filippo burst upon them with the news that three grand carriages, full of illustrious-looking *forestieri* and inviting hampers, were unloading themselves at a certain turn of the road where the grass was thick and the trees big and close together.

"Come!" said Maria, catching at Piccino's hand. She gave him a look over. His crying had left a flush in his soft cheeks and a little pathetic curve on his baby mouth, which was always like a tiny vermilion bow. His hat, with the tulips tumbling round it, was set on the back of his head, and the red and yellow things made his eyes look bigger and lovelier than ever by contrast. In these respects Maria saw that he was good for more cakes and *soldi* than ever. And it would never have occurred to her that tears and rubbing against the donkey had left him dirtier than ever. In Maria's world nobody troubled themselves about dirt. Washing oneself amounted almost to a religious ceremony. But ah! that little love of a Piccino was dirty—as dirty as he was soft and dimpled, and rich-coloured and beautiful.

Near the place where the pleasure-seekers had spread their feast upon the grass there was a low rough stone wall at the side of the road.

When the servants had spread the bright rugs and cushions upon the ground the party sat down in little groups. No sooner had they done this than one of the ladies looked up and broke into a little laugh.

“Look there!” she said, nodding in the direction of the low wall, which was only a few yards from them.

And those near her looked and saw a little boy peasant sitting with his legs dangling and gazing at them with the interest and satisfaction of a person who has had the good fortune to secure the best seat at a theatre.

“He is a sharp one,” said the lady. “He has got here first. There will be others directly. They are like a swarm of little vultures. The Bothwicks, who have the Villa des Palmier, were here a week ago, and they said children seemed to start up from the earth.”

The servants moved about in dexterous silence unpacking the hampers and spreading white cloths. The gentlemen sat at the ladies’ feet, and everybody laughed and talked gaily. In a few minutes the lady looked up and laughed again.

“Look,” she said, “now there are three!”

And there were six legs dangling, and the second and third pair were little girls’ legs, and their owners looked on at the strangers with cheerful composure, as if their assistance at the festive scene were the most proper and natural thing in the world.

The lady who had seen them first was a tall and handsome

Englishwoman. She had big coils of reddish-brown hair and large bright eyes, which looked restless and tired at the same time. Everybody seemed to pay her a great deal of attention. The party was hers, the carriages were hers, the big footmen were hers. Her guests called her Lady Aileen. She was a very rich young widow with no children, and though she had everything that wealth and rank could give she found it rather hard to amuse herself. Perhaps this was because she had given everything to Lady Aileen Chalmer that she could, and it had not yet occurred to her that anyone else in the world was any affair of hers.

"The Bothwicks came home in raptures over a child they had seen," she said. "They talked of him until it was fatiguing. They said he was as dirty as a pig and as beautiful as an angel. The rest of the children seemed to use him as a bait. I wish they would bring him to-day. I should like to see him. I must say I don't believe he was as beautiful as they said. You know Mary Bothwick is by way of being artistic and is given to raptures."

"Are you fond of children, Lady Aileen?" asked the man nearest to her.

"I don't know," she answered, "I never had one. But I think they are amusing. And these little Italian beggars are sometimes very handsome. Perhaps I should not be so bored if I had a very good-looking child. I should

want a boy. I believe I will buy one from a peasant some day. They will give you anything for money." She turned her face a little and laughed as she had done before.

"There are quite twelve on the wall now," she said, "perhaps more. I must count them." When they counted them they found there were fourteen. All in a row—all with dangling feet, all dirty, and all staring at what was going on with a composure which had no shadow of embarrassment touching it.

The row, having gained in numbers, was also beginning to be a little more lively. The young spectators had begun to exchange conversational and lively remarks upon the party, the big footmen, and the inviting things being handed about and eaten.

In ten minutes from that time Lady Aileen counted again and found there were twenty-two lookers-on, and when she reached the twenty-first she gave a slight start.

"Dear me!" she exclaimed, and laid down her fork.

"What is it, Lady Aileen?" asked a girl who sat at her side.

"I am perfectly certain the twenty-first one is the child the Bothwicks were talking about. And he *is* a handsome creature!"

"Which one?" the girl exclaimed, leaning forward to look. "The twenty-first. Oh, I am sure you mean the

one next to the end. What a beauty, Mr. Gordon, look at him !”

And Maria had the encouragement of seeing half a dozen people turn to look at Piccino, sitting by her on the wall, a marvel of soft-roundness and rich colour, his velvet eyes dreamily wide open as he gazed fixedly at the good things to eat, his crimson bow of a mouth with parted lips, his flaming tulips nodding round his torn felt hat.

Lady Aileen looked quite interested.

“I never saw such a beautiful little animal,” she said. “I had no idea children were ever really like that. He looks as if he had been deliberately made to order. But I should never have had the imagination to order anything so perfect.”

In a very few minutes everybody was looking at him and discussing him. Maria saw them, and all the other children saw them, and the whole party began to congratulate itself and feel its spirits exhilarated, because it knew how the matter would end. The only one who was not exactly exhilarated was, it must be confessed, Piccino himself. He felt a certain shy awkwardness when he was looked at and talked about so much. He was not much more than a baby after all, and he liked the cakes and little birds’ backs much better than he liked being looked at by so many grand ladies and gentlemen all at once. Perhaps too, if the truth were told, he was not as thrifty as Maria and her companions.

He liked the good things, but he did not like to ask for them, whereas the others did not object to begging at all. It was second nature to them.

On this occasion Maria, seeing what effect he had produced, wanted to lift him down from the wall and put him on the grass and make him go among the *signori* and hold out his hand.

But he clung to her and shook his head, and stuck out his vermilion under lip and would not go.

It was when he was doing this and Maria was whispering to him and scolding and coaxing, that Lady Aileen called to one of her footmen and told him to bring her a plateful of cakes and some *marrons glacées*.

"Does your ladyship wish me to take them to the beggar children?" asked Thomas, his distaste suppressed by respectful civility.

"No," Lady Aileen answered, rising to her feet. "I am going to take them myself."

"Yes, my lady," said Thomas, and stepped back. "It would have been safer to have let me do it," he remarked, in a discreet undertone when he returned to his fellows; "ladies' dresses are more liable to touch them by accident. And one wouldn't want to *touch* them."

Lady Aileen carried her plate to the line of spectators on the wall. Mr. Gordon and two or three others of the party followed her. All along the row eyes began to glisten and

mouths to water, but Lady Aileen went straight to Piccino. She spoke to him in Italian.

“What is your name?” she asked.

He hung back a little, keeping close to Maria. This was just what he did not like at all—that they would come and ask him his name and try to make him talk. He had nothing to say to people like them. He could talk to the donkey, but then the donkey was of his own world and they knew each other’s language.

“Tell the Signora your name,” whispered Maria, furtively pushing him.

“Piccino,” he said at length—the word coming through a little reluctant pout.

Lady Aileen laughed.

“He says his name is Piccino,” she said to her companions. “That means ‘little one,’ so I suppose it is a sort of pet name. How old is he?” she asked Maria.

Piccino was so tired of hearing that. They always asked it. He never asked how old they were. He did not want to know.

“He will be six in three months,” said Maria.

“Will you have some cakes?” said Lady Aileen. Piccino held out his horribly dirty dimpled hands, but Maria took off his hat with the tulips round it and held it out for him.

“If the Illustrissima will put them in here,” she said, “he can carry them better.”

Lady Aileen gave a little shudder, but she emptied the plate.

"What an awful hat!" she said to her friends. "They are quite like little pigs—but he looks almost prettier without it. Look how wonderful his hair is! It has dark red lights in it and is as thick as a mat. The curls are like the cherubs of the Sistine Madonna. If it were not so dirty I should like to put my hand on it."

She spoke in English, and Piccino wondered what she was saying about him. He knew it was about him, and he looked at her from under his veil of lashes.

"It would please me to have a child as handsome as that about me," she said.

"Why don't you buy him?" said Mr. Gordon. "You spoke of buying one just now. It would be like buying a masterpiece."

"So it would," said Lady Aileen. "That's an idea. I think I will buy him. I believe he would amuse me."

"For a while at least," said Mr. Gordon.

"He would always be well taken care of," said her ladyship, with a practical air. "He would be infinitely better off than he is now."

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She was a person who through all her life had cultivated the habit of getting all she had a fancy for. If one cultivates the habit, and has plenty of money, there are not many things one cannot have. There are some, it is true, but not

many. Lady Aileen had not found many. Just now she was rather more bored than usual. Before she had left England something had occurred which had rather troubled her. In fact she had come to the Riviera to forget it in change of surroundings. She had been to Monte Carlo, and had found it too excited and not new enough, as she had been there often before. She had been to Nice, and had said it was too much like a seaside Paris, and that there were so many English people, that walking down the Promenade des Anglais was like walking down Bond Street. She had tried San Remo because it was quiet, and she had a temporary fancy for being quiet, and then she had chanced to meet some people she liked. So she had taken a snow-white villa high above the sea, and with palms and orange-trees, and slender yellow green bamboos in the garden. And she had invited her new acquaintances to dinner and afternoon tea, and had made up excursions. Still she was often bored, and wanted some new trifle to amuse her. And actually, when she saw Piccino and Mr. Gordon suggested to her that she should buy him, it occurred to her that she would try it. If she had chanced to come upon a tiny, pretty, rare monkey, or toy terrier, or an unheard-of kind of parrot or cockatoo, she would have tried the experiment of buying it, and Piccino, with his dirty, beautiful little face, and his half-inch eyelashes, did not seem much more serious to her. He would cost more money, of course, as she would have to provide for him in

some way after he had grown too big to amuse her, but she had plenty of money, and she need not trouble herself about him. She need not see him if she did not wish to, after she had sent him to school—or to be trained into some kind of superior servant. Lady Aileen was not a person whose conscience disturbed her and caused her to feel responsibilities. And so after the party had been to explore Ceriani and the things that otherwise interested them, she asked Mr. Gordon to go with her to the poor little tumble-down house which Maria had pointed out to her as the home of Piccino. Maria had in fact had a rich harvest. Everybody had returned full of good things, and Piccino's small pocket was rich with *soldi*.

"I am going to carry out your suggestion," Lady Aileen said to Mr. Gordon as they walked down the road.

"What was it?" Mr. Gordon asked.

"That I should buy the child."

"Indeed," said Mr. Gordon. "You find you can always buy what you have a fancy for?"

"Nearly always," said Lady Aileen, knitting her handsome white forehead a little. "I have no doubt I can buy this thing I have a fancy for."

It chanced that she came exactly at the right moment. As they approached the house they heard even louder cries and lamentations and railings than Piccino had heard in the morning.

It appeared that old Beppo had repented his leniency, and

had come back for the donkey. He would not let it stay another night. He wanted to work it himself. He had brought his piece of rope, and had fastened it to the pretty grey head already—while Piccino's mother Rita wept and gesticulated and poured forth maledictions. The neighbours had come back to sympathize with her, and find out what would happen, and the children had begun to cry, and Annibale to swear, so that there was such a noise filling the air that if Lady Aileen had not been a cool and determined person she might have been alarmed.

But she was not. She did not wait for Mr. Gordon to command order, but walked straight into the midst of the altercation.

"What is the matter?" she demanded in Italian. "What is all this noise about?"

Then, after their first start of surprise at seeing the grand lady who was so plainly one of the rich *forestieri*—Rita and all her neighbours began to explain their wrongs at once. They praised the donkey, and reviled Annibale, and proclaimed that old Beppo was a malefactor without a soul, and a robber of the widow and the fatherless.

"Far better," cried Rita, "that my children should be without a father—an idle ugly brute who takes their bread out of their poor mouths. To sell their one friend who keeps them—the donkey!"

Old Beppo looked both sheepish and frightened when

Lady Aileen turned upon him as he was beginning to try to shuffle away with his property at the end of his rope halter.

"Stay where you are!" she said.

"Illustrissima," mumbled Beppo, "a thousand excuses. But I have work to do, and the donkey is mine. I have bought it. It is my donkey, Illustrissima."

Lady Aileen knew Italy very well. She drew out her purse that he might see it in her hand before she turned away from him.

"Stay where you are," she said, "I shall have something to say to you later."

Then she turned to Rita.

"Stop making a noise," she said, "I want to talk to you."

What could the Illustrious Signora have to say to a wretched woman? Rita wept. All her children must starve, she must starve herself, death from cold and hunger lay before them!

"No such thing," said Lady Aileen. "I will buy your donkey back, and give you food and fuel for the winter—for more than one winter—if you will let me have what I want."

Rita and the neighbours exclaimed in chorus. If she could have what she wanted, the Most Illustrious Signora! What could she want that a hovel could hold, and what could such poor creatures refuse her?

Lady Aileen made a gesture towards Piccino, who had gone to stand by the donkey, and had big tears on his eyelashes as he fondled its nose.

"I want you to lend me your little boy," she said; "I want to take him home with me and keep him. It will be much better for him."

The neighbours all exclaimed in chorus. Rita for a moment only stared.

"Piccino!" she said at length, "you want to take him—to make him your child!" And aside she exclaimed, "Mother of God! it is his eyelashes!"

Lady Aileen shrugged her shoulders slightly. "I cannot make him my child," she said, "but I will take care of him. He shall live with me, and be fed and clothed, and shall enjoy himself."

Maria clutched at her mother's apron.

"Mother," she said, "he will be a Signorine. He will ride in the carriage of the Illustrissima. It will be as if he were a Prince!"

"As if he were a Prince!" the neighbours echoed. "As if he were a King's son!" And they all looked at dirty little Piccino with a growing awe.

Rita looked at him too. She had never been a very motherly person, and these children, who had given her such hard work and hard fare, had been a combined trial and burden to her. She had never felt it fair that they should have come upon her. Each one had seemed an

added calamity, and when Piccino had been born he had seemed a heavier weight than all the rest. It was, indeed, well for him that his eyelashes had begun to earn his living so early. And now, if he could save their daily bread and the donkey for them, it would be a sort of excuse for his having intruded himself upon the world. But Rita was not the woman to let him go for a nothing.

"He is as beautiful as an angel!" she said; "he has brought in many a *live* only because the *forestieri* admire him so. His eyelashes are an inch long. When he is old enough to sing——"

Lady Aileen spoke aside to Mr. Gordon.

"I told you that I believed I could buy this thing I fancied," she said.

To Rita she said,—

"Tell me what you want. I will give you a reasonable sum. But you will be foolish if you try to be extortionate. I want him—but not so much that I will be robbed."

"I should be a foolish woman if I tried to keep him," said Rita; "he will have nothing to eat to-night if he stays here—nor to-morrow—nor the day after, unless a miracle happens. The Illustrious Signora will give him a good home, and will buy back the donkey and save us from starvation? I can come sometimes to the villa of the Signora and see him?"

"Yes," said Lady Aileen practically, "and the servants

will always give you a good meal and something to carry home with you. You can have him back at any time if you want him."

She said this for two reasons. One was because she knew his mother was not likely to want him back, because he would always be a source of small revenue. And then she herself was not a person of the affections, and if the woman made herself in the least tiresome she was not likely to feel it a grief to part with the child. She only wanted him to amuse her.

How it was all arranged Piccino did not in the least know. As he stood by the donkey, his mother and the neighbours, his father and Beppo, and the illustrious lady all talked together. He knew they were talking of him because he heard his own name, but he was too little to listen or care.

Maria listened to good purpose however. She was wildly excited and exhilarated. Before the bargain was half concluded she slipped over to Piccino's side, and tried to make him understand.

"The Signora is going to buy back the donkey," she said, "and give us money besides ; and you are going back in her beautiful carriage to San Remo, to live in her magnificent villa, and be a Signorine, and have everything you want. You will be dressed like the King's son, and have servants. You will be as rich as the *forestieri*."

Piccino gave her a rather timid look. He was not a

beloved nursery darling, he was only a pretty little animal who was only noticed because he was another mouth to feed, he was not of half as much consequence as the donkey. But the dirty place where he ate and slept was his home, and it gave him a queer feeling to think of tumbling about in a strange house.

But Maria was so delighted, and seemed to think he had such luck, and everybody got up a sort of excitement about him, and he did not want the donkey to be sold, and he was too young to realize that he could not come back as often as he liked. And in the end, when the matter was actually settled, he found himself part of a sort of triumphal procession, which escorted him back to the place where the carriages were. His mother and Maria, and several of the neighbours, walked quite proudly along the road with him, and even old Beppo followed at a distance, and the donkey having been freed from the halter and taking an interest in her friends, loitered along also, cropping grass as she went.

Lady Aileen and Mr. Gordon had gone on before them. When they reached the place where the rest of the party was waiting Lady Aileen explained the rather remarkable thing she had done, and did so with her usual direct coolness.

"I have bought the child with the eyelashes," she said, "and I am going to take him back to San Remo on the box with the coachman. He is too dirty to come near us until he is washed."

She was a person whom nobody thought of questioning, because she never questioned herself. She simply did what it occurred to her to do, and felt her own wish quite enough reason. She did not care in the least whether people thought her extraordinary or not. That was their affair and not hers.

"You have bought Piccino!" one of her friends exclaimed. "Does that mean you are going to adopt him?"

"I have not thought of it as seriously as that," said Lady Aileen. "I am going to take him home and have him thoroughly washed, however. When he is clean I will decide what I shall do next. The thing that interests me at present is that I am curious to see what he will look like when he has had a warm bath all over, and has been puffed with violet powder and had his hair combed. I want to see it done. I wonder what he will think is happening to him. Nicholson will have to take care of him until I find him a nurse. Look at his relatives and friends escorting him in procession down the road. They have already begun to regard him with veneration."

She beckoned to one of the men-servants.

"Greggs," she said, "you and Hepburn must put the child between you on the box. He is going back to San Remo with me. See that he does not fall off."

Greggs went to the coachman, with a queer expression of the nostrils.

“We’ve got a nice bunch of narcissuses to carry back between us. Her ladyship says the boy is to go with us on the box.”

“A nice go that is for two men that’s a bit particular themselves!” said the coachman. “Let’s hope he won’t give us both typhus fever.”

And under these auspices Piccino went forth to his strange experience.



CHAPTER II.



HE was too well accustomed to his dirt to think of it as being objectionable, so the way in which Greggs lifted him up on to the seat on the box did not at all explain itself to him. He did not realize that in exactly the same manner the excellent Greggs would have handled an extremely dirty little dog her ladyship had chosen to pick up by the wayside and order him to take charge of.

But though he did not understand how he was regarded by the illustrious signori in livery who sat near him, he was conscious that he was not comfortable, and felt that somehow they were not exactly friendly. His place on the box seemed at an enormous height from the ground, and as they went down hill over the winding road he was rather frightened, particularly when they rounded a sharp curve. It seemed so probable that he might fall off, and he was afraid to clutch at Greggs, who kept as far from him as possible under the circumstances.

It was a long, long drive back to San Remo, and it seemed longer to Piccino than it really was. San Remo to him appeared a wonderful foreign country. He had never been there, and only knew of it what Maria had told him. Maria had once gone there in a small cart drawn by the donkey, and she had never forgotten the exaltation of the adventure. She was always willing to describe over again the streets, the white villas, the shops, and the grand hotels.

Piccino was so tired that he fell asleep before the carriage had left the curving road, but when it reached the city the jolting of the wheels wakened him, and he opened his beautiful drowsy eyes and found them dazzled by the lights. They were not very bright or numerous lights, but they seemed so very dazzling to him, that he felt bewildered by them. If Maria had been with him he would have clung to her and asked questions about everything ; but even if he had not been too much a baby, and too shy, he could not have asked questions of Greggs, who was sufficiently English to feel his own language quite enough for a sensible footman. If the Italians wished to speak Italian that was their own taste, and they might bear the consequences of not being able to make him understand them. English was enough for Greggs.

So Piccino was borne through the amazing streets in silence. The people in the carriage had also become rather silent, having been lulled, as it were, by the long drive through the woods and olive groves. Lady Aileen, in fact,

had had time to begin to wonder if her new plan would prove as satisfactory and amusing as she had fancied it might. Mr. Gordon was quietly speculating about it himself; the other man in the carriage was thinking of the Battle of Flowers at Nice, and inventing a new scheme of floral decoration for a friend's victoria. The only person who was really thinking of Piccino himself was the girl who sat by Lady Aileen. She was a clever girl and kind, and she was wondering how he would like the change in his life, and if he had begun to feel homesick.

The carriage had to go uphill again before it reached Lady Aileen's villa. It was a snowy-white villa on an eminence, and it had a terraced garden and looked out over the sea. When they drove through the stately gateway Piccino felt his small heart begin to thump, though he did not know why at all. There were shadows of trees, and scents of roses and orange-blossom and heliotrope. And on the highest terrace the white house stood, with a glow of light in its portico, and gleams in its windows. Poor little dirty peasant baby, how could it be otherwise than that all this grandeur and whiteness should alarm him!

But there was just one thing that gave him a homely feeling. And oh, he felt it so good that it was so! As they turned in at the gate he heard a familiar sound. It was the hysteric sniffing, and jumping, and yelping whines of welcome of a dog—a poor exiled doggie whose kennel was kept close by the gate—probably to guard it. He was fastened

by a chain, and evidently being a friendly, sociable creature, did not like being kept in this lonely place, and not allowed to roam with the world. He could not have friendly fights and associates, and he could not rush about and jump on ladies' dresses and gentlemen's clothes, and leave his dusty or muddy affectionate paw-marks all over them. And so he was not happy, and when he heard footsteps approaching always strained at his chain and sniffed and whined. As these returning carriages belonged to his own domestic circle he almost went wild with joy, and leaped and yelped, and did his best to make somebody speak to him. He was adoringly fond of Lady Aileen, who scarcely ever noticed him at all, but once or twice had said, "Good fellow! Nice dog!" as she went by, and once had come and looked at him and given him two whole pats, while he had wriggled and fawned himself nearly into hysterics of dog delight.

And so it happened that as the carriage turned into the beautiful gateway Piccino heard this sound he knew—that loving, eager, pleading dog-voice which is as much Italian as it is English, and as much peasant as it is noble. The dogs in the hovels near Ceriani spoke just as Lady Aileen's dog did, and asked for just the same thing—that human things should love them a little and believe that they themselves love a great deal. And Piccino, who was only a beautiful little baby animal himself, understood it vaguely, and was somehow reminded of his friend the donkey, and felt not quite so many hundred miles from home and the tumble-

down stable and Maria. He involuntarily lifted his soft, dirty, blooming face to Greggs in the dark.

"A chi il cane?" he said (Whose dog is that?).

"What's that he's saying?" said Greggs to the coachman.

"Must be something about the dog," answered Hepburn.

"He said something or other about a carney, and carney means dog. It's a deuce of a language to make out."

And so, not being answered, Piccino could only resign himself, and, as the carriage rolled up the drive, listen to the familiar homely dog-sound and wish he could get down and go to the kennel. And then the carriage stopped before the door, and the door was thrown open by a liveried servant and showed the brilliantly lighted hall, where there were beautiful pictures and ornaments and curious things hung on the walls, and rich rugs on the floor, and quaint seats and bits of furniture about, so that to Piccino it looked like a grand room.

Lady Aileen spoke to the footman at the door.

"Send Nicholson to me," she said. "Bring the child into the hall," she said to Greggs.

So Piccino was taken down in as gingerly a manner as he had been put up, and Greggs set him discreetly on a bit of the floor not covered by rugs.

He stood there without moving, his luminous eyes resting on Lady Aileen.

Lady Aileen spoke to her companions, but he did not know what she was saying, because she spoke English.

"He is exactly like some little animal," she said. "He does not know what to make of it all. I am afraid he is rather stupid—but what a beauty!"

"Poor little mite," said the girl, "I daresay he is tired."

Nicholson appeared almost immediately. She was a neat, tall, prim young woman, who wore black cashmere and collar and apron of snow.

Lady Aileen made a gesture towards Piccino.

"I have brought this child from Ceriani," she said. "Take him upstairs and take his rags off and burn them. Give him a bath—perhaps two or three will be necessary. Get his hair in order. Modesta can change my dress for me. I shall come into the bath-room myself presently."

Piccino was watching her fixedly. What was she saying? What were they going to do to him?

She turned away and went into the *salon* with her guests, and Nicholson came towards him. She gave him the same uncomfortable feeling Greggs had given him. He felt that she did not like him—and she spoke in English.

"Come upstairs with me. I am going to wash you," she said.

But Piccino did not understand and did not move. So she had to take hold of his hand to lead him, which she objected very much to doing. She took him up the staircase and through landings and corridors, where he caught glimpses of wonderful bedrooms that were of dainty colours, and had silk and lace and frills and cushions in them, and made him feel

more strange than ever. And at last she opened a door and took him into a place which was all blue and white porcelain—walls and floors and everything else—including a strange large object in one corner, which had shining silver things at one end. And she released his hand and went to the silver things and twisted them round, and, as if by magic, two streams of clear water gushed out and began to fill the blue and white trough as the bed of a torrent is filled by the Spring rains.

Piccino's eyes grew bigger and more lustrous every second as he stared. Was she doing this interesting but rather alarming thing to amuse him? Maria had never seen anything like this in San Remo or she would certainly have told him. He was seeing more than Maria. For a moment or so he was not sorry he had come. If the rich *forestieri* had things like this to play with they must have other things as amusing. And somehow the water was hot. He could see the pretty white steam rise from it. He came a little closer to look. "Nicola," as he called her in his mind, having heard Lady Aileen speak to her as "Nicholson"—Nicola moved to and fro and collected curious things together—a white cake of something, a big light round thing made of holes, large pieces of thick soft white cloth, with fringe at the ends—something, these last, which must be like the things Maria had heard of as being used in churches by the priests.

"Che fai?" (What are you doing?) he said to Nicola.

But she did not understand him, and only said something

in English as she took off her white cuffs and rolled up her sleeves.

By this time the two rushing streams had splashed and danced into the bed of the torrent until it was nearly full. Nicola twisted the silver things as before, and by magic again the rushing ceased and the clear pool was still, the light vapour rising from it.

Nicola came to him and began to take off his clothes with the very tips of her fingers, speaking in English as she did it. He did not know what she was saying.

"A pretty piece of work for a lady's maid to do! My own clothes may go into the wash-tub and the rag-bag after it. The filth of such people is past bearing. And it's her ladyship all over to have such a freak. There's no end to her whims. Burn them! she might well say burn them. The sooner they are in the fire the better." She took off the last rag and kicked it aside with her foot. Piccino stood before her, a little soft brown cherub without wings.

"Upon my word," she said, "he is pretty! I suppose that's the reason."

Piccino was beginning to feel very queer indeed. The rushing water was amusing, but what was her intention in taking off all his clothes? That was not funny. Surely the *forestieri* wore clothes when they were in San Remo. And besides she had given his cherished trousers—the beautiful trousers of Sandro which had been given him for his own—a kick which had no respect in it, and which sent

them flying into a corner. His little red mouth began to look unsteady at the corners.

"Yes, that's the reason," she said. "It's because he's so pretty." And she picked him up in her arms and bore him to the bath.

Piccino looked down into the blue and white pool which seemed to him so big and deep. He felt himself being lowered into it and uttered a wild shriek. They were going to drown him—to drown him—to drown him!

He was in the water. He felt it all around him—nearly up to his shoulders. He clung to Nicola and uttered shriek after shriek, he kicked and splashed and beat with his feet, the water leaped and foamed about him and flew into his eyes and nose and mouth.

"Lasciatemi! Lasciatemi!" (Let me go! Let me go!) he screamed.

Nicholson tried her best to hold him.

"My goodness!" she exclaimed, "I can't manage him. He is like a little wild cat. Keep quiet, you naughty boy! Be still, you bad little pig, and let me wash you! Good gracious! what am I to do?"

But Piccino would not be drowned without a struggle. To be held in water like that! to be suffocated by its splashing in his nose and mouth, and blinded by its dashing in his eyes. He fought with feet and teeth, used his head like a battering ram, and shrieked and shrieked for aid.

“Io non ho fatto niente! Io non ho fatto niente! (I have done nothing.) Maria! Maria!”

And the noise was so appalling that almost immediately footsteps were to be heard upon the stairs, swift movement in the corridor, and the bath-room door opened.

It was Lady Aileen, who came in amazed, frowning and rather alarmed. The girl-friend who had wondered if Piccino would like his surroundings was with her.

Piccino threw back his head at sight of them and battled and shrieked still more wildly. He thought they must have come to his aid.

“M'amazza! M'amazza! Aiuto!” he wailed.

“Bless me, what is the matter?” exclaimed Lady Aileen, and came towards the bath.

“He doesn't like to be washed, my lady,” panted Nicholson, struggling. “He seems quite frightened.”

Suddenly Lady Aileen began to laugh.

“Take him out for a moment, Nicholson,” she said. “Take him out. Isobel,” to the girl, her words broken with laughter, “he thinks Nicholson is drowning him. Soap and water are such unknown quantities to him that he thinks that in this proportion they mean death.”

Nicholson had lifted her charge out at once, only too glad of the respite. Piccino stood wet and quaking and sobbing by the bath-tub.

Lady Aileen began to take off her gloves and bracelets.

“Give *me* an apron,” she said to Nicholson. And on



“No one is going to hurt you. You are only going to be made clean.”—page 77.

having one handed to her she tied it over her dress and knelt down before her new plaything.

"Little imbecile!" she said in Italian, taking hold of his wet shoulders. "No one is going to hurt you. You are only going to be made clean. You are too dirty to be touched, and the water will wash the dirt off."

Piccino only looked up at her, sobbing. At least she had had him taken out of the great pool—but what did she mean by wanting his dirt removed by such appalling means?

"I am going to wash you myself," said Lady Aileen, lifting him in her strong, white arms. "Don't let me have any nonsense. If you make a noise and fight I *will* drown you." She was laughing, but Piccino was struck dumb with fear. She looked so tall and powerful, and such a grand lady, that he did not know what she might feel at liberty to do in her powerfulness.

"It is only a bath," said the girl Isobel in a kind voice; "the water won't go over your head. Don't be frightened. It won't hurt."

Lady Aileen calmly put him back in the tub.

Her white hands were so firm and steady that he felt the uselessness of the struggle. And if he fought she might drown him. He looked up piteously at the Signorina with the encouraging face and voice and stood in the water aghast, and with big tears rolling down his cheeks, but passive in helpless despair.

But, ah! what strange things were done to him!

The Illustrious Signora took the cake of white stuff and the

big porous thing and rubbed them together in the water and made quantities of snow-white froth, then she rubbed him over and over and over, then she splashed the water over him until she washed the foam off his body, then she scrubbed him with something, then she did strange things to his ears, then she took a little brush and scrubbed his finger-nails—covering them with the white froth and then washing it off—then she did the same to his feet and rubbed them with a piece of stone.

Then she began with his head. Poor neglected little mop of matted silk—what did she not do to it? She rubbed it with the cake of white stuff till it was a soft slippery ball of foam, then she scrubbed and scrubbed and thrust her hands in it and shook it about and almost drowned him with the water she poured on it. If he had not been so frightened he would have yelled. But people who will do such things to you, what will they not do if you make them angry! Under this avalanche of snowy stuff, and this torrent of water, a wild, despairing memory of Maria and the donkey came back to him. Only last night he had fallen asleep in his corner among all the familiar sights and sounds and smells, and without water coming near him. And now he was nearly up to his neck in it; it was streaming from his hair, his ears, his body, he could hear and see and taste nothing else. Oh! could it be possible that he had been all wrong in that first imagining, that perhaps the rushing streams were to amuse him? Could it be that this was all to amuse the *forestieri*

themselves—that they had brought him to San Remo to make him live in water like a fish—that they would never let him out?

Suddenly the magnificent Signora lifted him out of the pool. She set him streaming upon something soft, and white, and dry, which Nicola had spread upon the blue and white tiles of the floor.

‘There!’ she said, ‘now I think he is clean for the first time in his life. Nicholson, you may rub him dry.’

She stood up laughing and rather flushed with exertion.

‘It has amused me,’ she said to Isobel; ‘I would not have believed it, but it *has* amused me. Almost anything new will amuse one the first time one does it. When you have brushed his hair, Nicholson, put him to bed.’

She laid aside the apron and picked up her gloves.

She went out of the room smiling, and Piccino was left to the big white cloths and Nicola.

What happened then was even more tiresome than the bath, though it was not so alarming. He was rubbed as if he were a little horse, and his hair received treatment which seemed to him incredible. When it was dry, strange instruments were used upon it. The knots and tangles were struggled with and dragged out. Sometimes it seemed as if his curls were being pulled out by the roots, sometimes as if his head itself was to be taken off. It seemed to him that he stood hours by Nicola’s knee whimpering. If Maria had been rash enough to attempt to subject him to such in-

dignities he would have kicked and screamed and fought, but in this wonderful house, among these wonderful people, who were all *forestieri*, he was terror-stricken by his sense of strangeness. To be plunged into water—to be rubbed and scrubbed—to have the hair dragged from one's head—who would not be terrified? Suddenly he buried his face in Nicola's lap and broke into woful weeping. "Voglio andare a casa. Lasciammi andare a Maria e il ciuco! (I want to go home. Let me go home to Maria—and the donkey!)" he cried.

"Well, well, it is nearly done now," said Nicholson. "And a nice job it has been! And what I am to put you to bed in I don't know, unless in one of her ladyship's own dressing jackets."

"Voglio andare a casa!" he wept. But Nicholson did not understand him in the least. She went and found one of the dressing jackets and brought it back to the bath-room. It was covered with rich lace and tied with ribbons; it was too big and he was lost in it; but when Nicholson bundled him up in it, and he stood with the lace frills dangling over his hands, and his beautiful little face and head rising above the great rich ruff they made, he was a wonderful sight to see.

But he was not aware of it, and only felt as if he were dressed in strange trickery, and when he was picked up and carried out of the room—the beautiful trousers of Sandro being left on the floor in the corner—he felt that the final indignity had been offered.

She carried him into one of the wonderful rooms he had caught a glimpse of. It was all blue, and was so amazing with its frills and blue flowers and lace and ornaments that he thought it must be a place where some other strange thing was to be done to him. But Nicola only put him down on a soft place covered with lace, and with a sort of tent of lace and silk at the top of it.

She said something to him in English and went away and left him.

He sat and stared about him. Was it a place where people slept? Did the *forestieri* lay their heads on those white things? Was this soft wonder he sat on a bed? He looked up above him at the beautiful tent and felt so lost and strange that he could almost have shouted for Maria again. If she had been there, or if he could have understood what Nicola said it would not have been so awful. But it was so grand and strange, and Ceriani and Maria and the donkey seemed in another world thousands of miles away. It was as if suddenly he had been taken to Paradise and had found himself frightened and homesick because it was so far from Ceriani and so different.

Nicola came back with a plate. There were things to eat on it, and she offered them to him. And then he realized that a strange thing had happened to him which had never happened before in his life. There, before him, was a plateful of good things—things such as the *forestieri* brought in their hampers, and he did not want them! Something

seemed to have filled up his throat and he could not eat. He—Piccino—actually could not eat. The tears came into his eyes and he shook his head.

“Non ho fame” (I am not hungry), he whimpered. And he poked the plate away.

“I suppose he has been stuffed with cakes all day,” said Nicholson, “and he is too sleepy. Good gracious, how pretty he is!”

She turned down the frilled and embroidered sheets and gave the pillows a little thump. Then she picked Piccino up again, put him into the bed and covered him up. He lay among the whiteness, a lovely picture put to bed, his eyes wide open and shining with his awe.

“Go to sleep!” she said, “and don’t be a bad boy.” And then she turned out the light and walked out of the room, leaving the door a little open.

Piccino lay among the softness, his eyes growing bigger and bigger in the dark. He was so little, and everything around him seemed so large and magnificent. This was the way the King’s son was put to bed—bundled up in a strange garment, with lace frills tickling his ears and cheeks, and with big sleeves which prevented his using his hands. And he could not hear the donkey in her stable—the donkey who must be there this very moment, because she had not been taken away, but had been bought back from Beppo. Oh, if he could hear her now—but perhaps—perhaps he never could get to the stable again—the

forestieri—the strange rich lady would never let him go back—never!

A little sob broke from him—under Lady Aileen's dressing jacket his breast heaved piteously, he turned and buried his face upon the pillow, and wept, and wept, and wept.

He cried so that he found he was beginning to make little sounds in spite of himself, and he tried to smother them, because he did not know what the *forestieri* did to children who made a noise—perhaps held them under the rushing streams of water. But just at the moment when he was trying to stifle his sobs and prevent their becoming wails a strange thing happened. The door was pushed open, and someone came into the room. At least he heard a sound of feet on the floor, though he did not see anyone even when he peeped. Feet? They were not Nicola's feet, but softer and more pattering. He held his breath to listen. They came to his bed and stopped. And then he heard something else—a soft familiar panting, almost as familiar as the donkey's stirring in the stable. He sat up in bed.

“E un cane” (It is a dog), he cried.

And the answer was a leap, and a rough, dear hairy body was beside him, while a warm, excitedly lapping, affectionate tongue caressed his hand, his face, his neck.

For in some mysterious way the lonely dog at the entrance gate had slipped his collar, and in rushing through the house to find someone to love and rejoice over had heard the little smothered sobs, and come in at once to

answer and comfort him, knowing in his dog heart that here was one who was lonely and exiled too.

And Piccino fell upon him and caught him in his arms, dragging him close to his side, rubbing his wet cheeks upon the rough, hairy coat, and so holding him, nestled against and pillowed his head upon him, rescued from his loneliness and terror almost as he might have been if he had been the donkey.



CHAPTER III.



IT was a great comfort to go to sleep embracing and embraced by a shaggy friend of one's own world, but when the morning came it seemed that somehow to the *forestieri* it appeared a different thing. When Nicola came in she uttered an exclamation of horror.

"The dirty little thing!" she cried. "Ah, my goodness, he has been asleep all night with that dusty, muddy dog! What *will* my lady say? Look at his face and the sheets, and her ladyship's jacket!"

Piccino sat up in his silk and lace tent, holding on to the dog. Something was wrong, he saw, though he understood nothing. What could it be?

"Get out!" cried Nicholson, slapping the dog vigorously. "Get out! How in the world did you get here?" And she pushed the shaggy friend off the bed, and ran after him, driving him out of the room.

Lady Aileen met her on the threshold.

"What is that animal doing here?" she asked.

"Indeed, my lady, I don't know," said Nicholson. "He never did such a thing before. He must have sniffed out the child. He has been sleeping with him all night."

"Sleeping with him!" exclaimed Lady Aileen. She stepped into the bedroom and stood for a moment gazing at Piccino.

The dog had been both muddy and dusty. (Both Piccino and the bed revealed unmistakable signs of the fact.)

"Dear me!" said her ladyship. "Nicholson, take him at once and wash him."

And so he was taken again into the blue and white porcelain bath-room. He could not believe the evidence of his senses when Nicola turned the silver things again, and the streams came rushing forth. He stood and looked at her, quaking. And she came and took off his fantastic night-gown as she had taken off his rags the night before. And she lifted him up and put him into the deep water again, and soaped, and splashed, and washed him, almost as hard as she had done it the first time.

He began to feel stunned and dazed. He did not scream, or fight, or struggle. He simply gave himself up, and stared into space. Moment by moment Ceriani removed itself farther and farther. The dog had brought it nearer, but the dog had been torn away from him. And here he was in the water being scrubbed once more.

He was taken out and rubbed dry, and Nicola left him for a moment again. When she came back she carried white

things. She began to put them on. A strange little fine shirt with lace—curious little short things for his legs—not the beautiful masculine trousers of Sandro, alas! but short white things trimmed with embroidery, and only just reaching to his knees. And then—a petticoat! Yes, it was a petticoat! Just as if he had never been a man at all! He pushed it aside, his cheeks crimson with indignation.

“Roba di donna! No! No! Dove sono miei pantaloni! Io porto pantaloni!” (Not women’s clothes. Where are my trousers?—I wear trousers.)

Nicholson gave him a sharp slap. She was tired of his Italian exclamings.

“You naughty child!” she said. “Behave yourself! I don’t know what you mean, but I won’t have it!” And so, in spite of himself, the indignity was put upon him. He was dressed in *roba di donna* just like a girl. And round his waist was tied a broad sash, and round his neck was put a lace collar, and on his brown legs short socks, which did not reach his calves. And at his back there was a big bow, and under his chin a smaller one—and combs were dragged through his hair as before, and brushes plied on it. And when it was all done he stood feeling like a mountebank, and dumb and scarlet under his sense of insult.

Let him once get away—let him once get away, and he would show them whether they would get him again! He did not know how far it was to Ceriani, but if he could steal out of a door when no one was looking and

walk back, they might take the donkey if they liked, but he would scream and kick, and fight and bite, until they were afraid to touch him, before they should buy him again !

This was rankling in his mind as Nicholson pulled him after her down the staircase and through the hall to the breakfast-room. Nicholson was getting rather cross. She had not been engaged as a nurse, but as a maid. And she had had to go through all that scrubbing in the evening, and in the morning had had to rush out and borrow clothes for the child to wear from one of Lady Aileen's married friends, and she had not enjoyed having to get up and take a walk so early.

But her grievance was not so deep a one as Piccino's.

When he was taken into the breakfast-room Lady Aileen made him feel sulkier than ever. It was the way she looked at him, though he did not in the least know why. If he had been old enough he might have known that to be looked at as if one was not a person, but only a curious little animal, is enough to make anyone rebellious. She called him to her just as she would have called her black poodle.

"Come here !" she said.

He went to her sticking his red mouth out.

"What are you pouting for ?" she asked. "What is the matter, Nicholson ?"

"I don't know, my lady," answered Nicholson, with rather acid respectfulness. "He doesn't like to be washed, and he doesn't like to be dressed. I suppose he's not used to being kept tidy."

"Kept tidy!" said Lady Aileen, "I should think not. You look very nice in your new clothes," she added to Piccino, in Italian.

"Ma queste sono vestite di ragazza" (but these are girl's clothes), he said, pouting.

"You will wear what I wish," said Lady Aileen. "Nicholson, give him some porridge. I am going to feed him as English children are fed. Heaven knows how he will behave at table. I am curious to see."

It was only that—she was curious to see.

And the queer breakfast was given to him. Not nice black bread and figs, or pasta or salad, but oatmeal porridge, which he had never seen before. He did not like it. It seemed sloppy and flavourless to him, and he would not eat it. He pushed it back and sat and pouted, and Lady Aileen was amused, and sat and talked English to the visitors who were at table with her, and they told each other how pretty he was, and how like a picture, and how interesting it was that, in spite of being dressed like an English child, and given porridge to eat, he was still more than ever nothing but a beautiful little Italian peasant.

And all the day was like that, and, baby as he was, he raged within his little soul, knowing somehow that he was only there to be looked at and remarked upon, and to amuse them by being a curiosity.

They took him out in a grand carriage and drove him about the town, taking him to shops and buying clothes for

him—always *roba di donna*—and when they were tried on and he looked angry Lady Aileen laughed, and even the men or women in the shops made jokes aside. He would have liked to fly at them and kill them, but they were so big and he was so little—only Piccino from Ceriani.

And then they took him back to the Villa—the poor dog leaping and straining at his chain, by which he was fastened again, when they passed the gate—and his face and hands were washed once more, and his hair combed, and he was given more strange things for dinner. A solid underdone English chop without sauce seemed a horrible thing to him, and nursery rice-pudding filled him with amazement. He stared at the big potato Nicola put on his plate, and wondered if he was to be made to starve.

“Goodness, what does the child want?” exclaimed Nicholson; “I am sure he has never had such a dinner set before him before.”

That was exactly it. He had lived on things so different that this substantial nursery food quite revolted him.

He thought of himself only as a prisoner. He began to feel empty and furious. He was possessed by but one thought—how he could get away.

In the afternoon he was dressed again—in another girl's frock and sash and lace collar—and a lot of ladies and gentlemen came to see Lady Aileen. Her five-o'clock teas were very popular, and this afternoon everyone wanted to

see the child she had picked up at Ceriani. People were always curious about her whims. So Piccino was talked about and examined and laughed over as the most charming of jokes, and the more he hung back and pouted the more he was laughed at until his cheeks were crimson all the time, and he would not eat the cakes people kept giving him, just as they would have fed a parrot to make it talk, or a poodle to make it play tricks.

"He seems rather a sulky child," said Lady Aileen. "And he evidently detests civilization. He thought Nicholson was going to drown him, and fought like a little tiger when she put him in his bath. The watch-dog broke loose and came and slept with him last night. He has hardly eaten anything to day. I wonder if one could civilize him."

While all the gay people were drinking tea and chocolate, and eating cakes in the *salon*, and sauntering in groups among the flowers on the terrace, some strolling musicians came into the grounds. A man and woman and some children who played guitars and mandolins, and sang peasant songs, seeing the bright dresses and hearing the voices, were attracted by them. At such places they often got money.

When they began to play and sing Piccino ran to the window. They sang as the people at Ceriani did, and he was wild to see them. When he saw them he wanted to get near them. There was a boy who sang with the father

and mother, and a girl about the age of Maria who was not singing. It was she who went round to beg for money, and she stood aside calmly munching a piece of black bread. She had other pieces of something tied in her apron, and she looked so like Maria did when she had begged something good that Piccino's mouth watered, and a bold idea came to him.

Everybody was so busy amusing themselves that for a while he was forgotten. He glanced furtively about him and slipped out of a side-door.

The next minute the girl who was like Maria almost jumped. From among the rose-trees and palms she stood by there came a strange little figure. It was a child dressed grandly, as if he belonged to the richest of the *forestieri*; but he had a beautiful little dark rich-coloured face and immense black eyes, and he looked at her only as one little peasant looks at another, and he spoke in the Italian only spoken by peasant children.

"I am hungry," he said. "I have had nothing to eat. Give me some of your bread."

The girl stared at him, bewildered.

"Some bread!" she exclaimed. "Do you live here?"

"I live at Ceriani," he said; "I am Piccino. The Signora took me away. Give me some bread."

She broke off a big piece, still staring wildly. She had a vague idea that perhaps he would give her something for



"'I am hungry,' he said. 'I have had nothing to eat. Give me some of your bread.'"—page 92.

it. In her apron she had a piece of Salame sausage, well flavoured with garlic, and she broke off a piece of that and gave it to him too.

Piccino seized it and devoured it. Never in his life had anything seemed so good to him. He ate like a little wolf—alternate bites of black bread and sausage. His face and hands became smeared and covered with grease. He clutched his Salame so hungrily and ate in such a hurry.

“Don’t they feed you?” asked the girl.

“They have lumps of raw meat, and I cannot eat their pasta,” said Piccino.

It was in this guise mutton-chops, oatmeal-porridge, and rice-pudding appeared to him.

Mr. Gordon, who was one of the visitors, chanced to look out of the window. He put up his eye-glass suddenly.

“Piccino is fraternizing with the little girl-musician, Lady Aileen,” he said, with a laugh, “and they are eating bread and sausage.”

“Horrors!” exclaimed Lady Aileen.

She sent Greggs out to bring him in at once.

Greggs returned in a few minutes bringing him, hanging back reluctantly, his cheeks and mouth glossy with sausage grease, and exhaling such fragrance that people became aware of him as he approached, and stepped aside, making a pathway.

"Horrors!" said Lady Aileen again. "He *reeks* with garlic. Take him away at once, Greggs. Take him to Nicholson, and--and tell her to *wash* him."

And so, for the third time that day, Piccino was deluged with soap-and-water. But it was not possible for Nicholson to wash away the fragrance of the garlic. Even when he shone with cleanliness outwardly and had had still another frock put on, he was redolent of it, and perfumed all the air about him. He was not, of course, able to translate the names Nicholson called him, but he knew very well that he was being called names. He had often heard Maria scolded at home, but he had not been exactly used to ratings himself. But he could not mistake Nicholson. She was in a rage, and thought him a dirty, troublesome little pig. She had been dressed trimly for the afternoon, and had been enjoying herself looking on at the party in the garden, and to be called to wash and dress again a greasy little peasant smelling of garlic was more than her temper could stand. In fact, it happened at last, at some movement of resentment of Piccino's, she gave him a sound slap for the second time that day.

He opened his mouth, gave one howl of rage, and then as suddenly stopped. If he had been twenty-six instead of six he would have stuck his knife into her, if he had had one. He belonged to a race of people which used knives. As it was, the look in his handsome eyes gave Nicholson a queer feeling.

He could not be taken back to the *salon*, and Nicholson did not intend to sit in the room with him and inhale garlic. So she set him smartly in an arm-chair and left him, going out and shutting the door after her. She was going to stay in an adjoining chamber and look out of the window, coming to give him a glance now and then.

And there he sat breathing passion and garlic after she had gone. Upon the wall opposite to him there hung an oval mirror, with a frame of flowers in Dresden china. He could see himself in it—his beautiful little face, his flashing eyes and fiercely-pouting mouth, his lace collar and bow, and his *vestiti di ragazza*, altogether. He did not know he was pretty, he only felt he was ridiculous—that they had kept putting him in water, that the servants despised him and did not want to touch him; that he had been scolded and slapped, and that the donkey would not know him. Suddenly big tears rushed into his eyes. Was he going to stay here always and be put in water every few hours, and called names, and have no one to play with, and never understand anybody—and never see Maria and the donkey? Never—never! The big tears rolled hot and angry as well as miserable down his soft cheeks.

“Voglio andare a casa!” he sobbed. “Voglio andare a casa!” (I want to go home! I want to go home!)

When Nicholson came to look at him he was lying against the cushioned arm of the chair fast asleep.

“Goodness knows I am not going to waken him!” she said. “I shall let him sleep until I have had my dinner and it is time to give him his. If her ladyship intends to keep him she must have a regular nurse.”



CHAPTER IV.



T was dusk when he wakened. Lady Aileen's callers had departed some time ago, and Lady Aileen herself had departed to take a twilight drive, which was a thing she was fond of doing. The servants were enjoying themselves in their own fashion in the kitchen, and all the

house seemed very quiet.

It seemed so still to Piccino when he slipped off his chair and stood on his feet rubbing his eyes that for a moment he felt a little frightened. He was so accustomed to living in a hovel crowded with children and only partitioned off from the donkey that Lady Aileen's villa seemed enormous to him. It was not enormous, but it seemed so. He looked round him and listened.

"Nobody is here!" he said. "Everyone has gone away—Nicola has gone away."

He certainly did not want Nicholson, but his sense of desolation overwhelmed him.

And then, as he stood there, there came a sound which seemed to alter everything. It came through the window,

which was open, and which he ran towards at once. It was the voice of the friend who had come to him the night before—the dog who lived in the fine kennel at the gate and wanted human things so much and was so unhappy.

Piccino listened to him a moment, and his breath began to come quickly. He turned round and went to the door. It was not locked—Nicholson had not thought of that. It was easy enough to open, and when he had opened it he made his way quickly towards the stairs.

He did not go out at the big front door at which he had been brought in. That was shut, and he knew he was too little to open it; but he remembered the side entrance into the garden, out of which he had slipped when he went to the girl who looked like Maria. He found it again, and passed through it, and was out among the flowers in a moment, running quickly down the broad drive to the gate.

How the dog jumped and yelped and covered him with caresses when he reached the kennel! He knew his small bed-fellow again well enough. Perhaps, too, he liked the fragrance of the garlic, which was still as perceptible as ever. The two embraced and rubbed against each other, and tumbled affectionately about, until Piccino was quite dirty enough for the bath-tub again. But there was to be no more bath-tub if he could help it. He wanted the dog to come with him, though, and help him to find his way, and he fumbled and struggled with the chain and collar, until

his friend was loose, and finding that nothing held him, began to race up and down in breathless rapture and run in circles, darting like a wild thing.

"Come," said Piccino. "Come with me. I am going home."

He did not realize the number of chances there might be that he would be caught and carried back into bondage. He was not old enough to think much of that, but he just knew enough to teach him that it was best to keep in the shade when he saw anyone coming. He trudged along, keeping under trees and near walls, and he was clever enough to do it until he turned off the highway which led through the city. He passed by houses, and shops, and villas, and gardens, but at last he turned into the road which sloped up among the olive vineyards, into the hills. Then he felt that he was at home. He did not know that he was still miles and miles away from Ceriani; he only knew that the big trees and the little ones were familiar things, that when he lifted his face he could see the sky he knew so well, and that the wind that blew softly up from the sea among his curls was something he seemed to have been far away from during these last strange two days. These things made him feel that Ceriani must be near.

He was used to running about and being on his legs all day or he would have been tired out long before he was. When he did begin to be tired he sat down on the

grass, and the dog sat with him. In their own way they talked to each other. Then they would get up and trudge on.

They had rested and trudged on many times before he began to be really discouraged. But his legs were so short, and in time he began to feel as if Ceriani was too far away ! Stars were beginning to come out, and he suddenly realized that he was very little, and it had taken the big carriages of the *forestieri* quite a long time to return to San Remo after their picnic. He sat down suddenly and began to cry.

"We can't find it," he said to the dog, "we can't find it !"

The dog looked very much grieved. It is probable that he knew quite well what Piccino said. He shook his head until his ears made a flapping noise. Then he pushed close to Piccino and kissed him, lapping the salt tears off his soft cheeks as they rolled down. He knew he could have found the place all by himself and got there without any particular trouble, but he could not leave his friend, and such a little friend too, by the roadside. So he pressed close to him and looked sympathetic and kissed his tears off cheeringly.

"We can't find it," wailed Piccino. "Maria ! Maria ! Maria ! Ma-ri-a !!"

Up the curve of the road below there toiled a donkey dragging a cart. It was one of the little peasant carts floored with a lattice work of ropes, and there were three people in it. They were a boy and two very young men.

They had been to a *festa*, and the boy was fast asleep, and the two young men were in very good spirits. They had been dancing and enjoying themselves, and had had so much wine that they were in very good spirits, and not quite sure of what they were doing. They alternately sang songs and made jokes and laughed at each other. One of the favourite jokes was about a pretty peasant girl they had both been dancing with, and as it chanced her name was Maria. After a good deal of such joking they had both been silent for a while, being a little stupid with the wine they had had, and quietened a little by the motion of the cart as the donkey jogged along with it. It was very peaceful in this place, with the gentle wind from the sea, and the occasional rustle of the olives and the stars shining sweetly above the many shadows.

"What are you thinking of, Pietro?" said one to the other at last, with a little laugh.

"Maria! Maria! Ma-ria! Ma-ri-a!!" wailed Piccino, a few hundred feet above them.

They both burst out laughing at once.

"Of Maria! Maria!" said Alessandro. "The very trees call out to you!" And they found this such a beautiful joke that they laughed until the very donkey was afraid they would roll off the cart.

By the time they stopped they were close to Piccino, and whether because she wanted a rest or from some queer instinct the donkey stopped too.

"Maria!" cried Piccino. "Voglio andare a casa! Voglio *an-dar-e*!"

"It is a child," said Pietro! "It is lost!"

They had had wine enough to be good-natured and ready for any adventure. Pietro got out of the cart and rather unsteadily went to the side of the road where Piccino sat crying with his dog.

"Who are you?" he said. "And what are you doing here?"

Piccino answered him with sobs. He was not so clear as he thought he was, and Pietro and Alessandro laughed a good deal. They thought he was a great joke—all the more when they saw how he was dressed. Their heads were not clear enough to permit them to quite understand what was meant by the childish rambling and disconnected story about the *forestieri* and the water and Nicola and the donkey, but they found out that somehow the young one lived near Ceriani and wanted to get home to Maria. They themselves lived not far from Ceriani, and if they had been quite sober might have put this and that together and guessed something of the truth, but as it was it happened to seem enough of a joke for them to be inclined to carry it out.

"Let us take him in the cart as far as we go," said Alessandro. "He can find his way home after we leave him. Perhaps he will talk to us about his Maria. She may be prettier than the other one."

And so he was lifted into the cart, and the dog trotted joyfully by the donkey's side. The two probably talked to each other confidentially, and everything was explained between them as far as the dog could explain it. At all events he could explain the loneliness of living in a kennel with a chain round your neck and grand people passing you laughing and talking and taking no notice, however much you jumped and whined and begged to have a pat and a word, and not seeing that you loved everybody.

Piccino sat in the cart and leaned against Pietro or the boy, and enjoyed himself. He answered questions about Maria, and did not know why his rescuers laughed at everything he said. Maria seemed a very mature person to him, and he did not know that the young men's impression that she was a pretty young woman was not the correct one. Pietro had some good things he had brought from the *fiesta* in a paper, and he gave him some. That he was such a pretty, soft, rabbit-like little thing made things pleasant for him, even when he was picked up from the roadside by two young peasants full of cheap wine. They laughed at his disconnected babbling, and thought him great fun, and when he was sleepy let him cuddle down and be comfortable.

He was very fast asleep when they wakened him, having reached the end of their journey.

"Here!" they said, shaking him good-naturedly enough. "You can find your way to Maria now."

He stood unsteadily in the road where Pietro put him, rubbing his eyes and feeling the dog greeting him again by jumping at him and kissing him.

"Where is Maria?" he said, sleepily.

Pietro and Alessandro were sleepy too by this time—they had almost had time to forget him while he was asleep.

"Go on and you will find her," they said. "Ceriani is near here."

When he saw the donkey led away Piccino was on the point of crying because he was to be left, but before he quite began he saw by the light of the moon, which had risen since he fell asleep, a familiar tree, a big twisted and huge-trunked olive he had sat under many a time when he had strayed down the road with Maria. It made his heart begin to beat fast, and his rising tears dry in their fountain. It was true! He was near Ceriani! He was near home. He could find it. He began to run as fast as his short legs could carry him. The white villa and the grand signori who had joked about him all day, the bath-tub and Nicola, and the dreadful *pasta* seemed as far away now as Ceriani and the donkey had been this morning. The tears that had dried for joy suddenly began to rise again for joy. He did not know anything about it himself, but it was joy which made him begin to choke—this beautiful little savage peasant who had been taken away to a world so much too grand for him.

He ran and ran, and at every yard he saw something that he knew, and felt that he loved it because he knew it. The

late moon shone down on him—a little white figure running eagerly—the trees rustled as he passed.

“Maria! Maria!” he said; but he did not say it loud but softly.

And at last he had reached it—his own dear hovel, which he seemed to have left a thousand years ago. He stood and beat on the door with his little soft fists.

“Maria! Maria!” he said, “open the door. I have come home. Let me in!”

But inside they slept the heavy sleep of worn out-peasants and of tired childhood. They could not have heard him even if he had been able to make more noise. His child hands could make very little. They slept so heavily that he could hear them.

And there he stood in the moonlight, thumping on the old door unanswered. And the dog stood by him, wagging his tail and looking up at him with such a companionable air that he could not feel he was alone, and actually did not begin to cry. At all events he had got home, and was among the hills again, with the trees growing close around him. And Maria and the donkey!

His whimper lost itself in a sudden sense of relief. Yes, there was the donkey in her stable, and the door would keep nobody out.

“The donkey will let us in,” he said to the dog, “Let us go in there.”

And a few moments later the donkey was roused from

her sleep by something soft stumbling against her as she lay down, and being a donkey with a memory she realized that a familiar friend had come to her at this untimely hour, and she knew the little voice that spoke, and the little body which cuddled against her side as if she were a pillow, and being also affectionate and maternal she did not resent the intrusion by any unfriendly moving.

And in the early, early morning, when Rita opened the stable-door and let in a shaft of the gold sunlight which was lighting up the darkness of the olive-trees, the first thing it shone upon was the beautiful, tired, little travel-stained figure of Piccino who lay fast asleep against the donkey's grey side, his arms around her neck, and the dog's body pressed close and lovingly against his own.

Upon the whole Lady Aileen was not very much surprised, and not at all disturbed when it was found that he was gone. She sent someone to Ceriani, and when the news was brought back to her that he was discovered there, she only laughed a little. In fact she had found it too tiresome an amusement to undertake the management of a lovely little wild animal to whom civilization only represented horror and dismay. She sent Rita some money—not too much, but enough to make her feel quite rich for a few weeks. For the rest, she only remembered

Piccino as part of an anecdote it was rather amusing to tell to those of her friends in London who were entertained by anecdotes.

“He thought we were savages or mad,” she used to say. “I think he might have borne anything, perhaps, but the bath-tub. He said that we ‘put him in water!’”



HOW FAUNTLEROY OCCURRED

AUTHOR'S NOTE.

SOME short time ago I was asked to contribute to a series of articles then being published by a well known magazine—in which a number of authors described how they wrote certain of the best known of their books. I was applied to for an article which was to be entitled, “How I wrote Little Lord Fauntleroy.” When the request was first made to me, I replied that I could really see nothing I could say on the subject which could be of any definite interest. There had been no special process. I had simply dipped my pen into ink and written the story. But it was considered that something further might be said, and on reflection it occurred to me that the fact that Cedric Errol had grown out of the memories of the every-day loveliness of a very real little boy might have an interest. But for the existence of one pretty loving and delightfully amusing small boy, “Little Lord Fauntleroy” would never have been written ; but for the quaint speeches and affectionate confidingness of a real seven-year-old child, Cedric Errol would never have existed. And as Cedric Errol is considered an ideal little fellow, it seemed worth while to show that he had first been real. Accordingly I made a record of certain memories of the real child on which I had founded the story of the ideal one. And in this manner was written “How Fauntleroy Occurred.”

FRANCES HODGSON BURNETT.



"Are you in society, Mrs. Wilkins?"—see page 140.

HOW FAUNTLEROY OCCURRED,

AND A VERY REAL LITTLE BOY BECAME AN IDEAL ONE.



CHAPTER I.

HIS ENTRANCE INTO THE WORLD.



IT has always been rather interesting to me to remember that he first presented himself in an impenetrable disguise. It was a disguise sufficiently artful to have disarmed the most wary. I, who am not at all a far-sighted person, was completely taken in by him. I saw nothing to warrant in the slightest degree any suspicion that he had descended to earth with practical intentions; that he furtively cherished plans of making himself into the small hero of a book, the picturesque subject of illustrations, the

inspiration of a fashion in costume, the very *jeune premiere* in a play over which people in two continents would laugh and cry.

Perhaps in periods before he introduced himself to his family that morning of April 5, 1876, in a certain house in Paris, he may have known all this and laid out his little plans with adroitness and deliberation ; but when I first examined him carefully as he lay on my arm looking extremely harmless and extremely fast asleep in his extremely long night-gown, he did not bear at all the aspect of a crafty and designing person ; he only looked warm and comfortable and quite resigned to his situation.

He had been clever enough to disguise himself as a baby, a quite new baby in violet powder and a bald head and a florid complexion. He had even put on small, indefinite features and entirely dispensed with teeth, besides professing inability to speak, a fastidious simplicity of taste in the matter of which limited him to the most innocuous milk diet. But beneath this disguise there he lurked, the small individual who, seven years later—apparently quite artlessly and unconsciously—presented his smiling, ingenuous little face to the big world and was smiled back upon by it—Little Lord Fauntleroy. He was a quite unromantic little person. Only a prejudiced maternal parent could have picked him out from among seventy-five other babies of the same age ; but somehow we always felt that he had a tiny character of his own, and somehow it was always an amusing little character, and one's natural tendency was to view him in rather a jocular light.

In the first place he had always been thought of as a little girl. It was the old story of "your sister, Betsy Trotwood," and when he presented himself with an unflinching firmness in the unexpected character of a little boy serious remonstrance was addressed to him.

"This habit you have contracted of being a little boy," his mamma said to him, "is most inconvenient. Your name was to be Vivien. 'Vivien' is early English and picturesque and full of colour; Vivian, which is a boy's name, I don't think so much of. It sounds like a dandy, and reminds me of Vivian Grey; but after the way you have behaved it is about all I can do for you, because I am too tired of thinking of names to be equal to inventing anything else."

If it had not been for his disguise and his determination not to be betrayed into the weakness of speech it is quite possible he might have responded:

"If you will trust the matter to me I will manage to reconcile you to the name, and make you feel there is some consolation for the fact that I preferred to be myself, instead of Vivien. Just give me time."

We were, of course, obliged to give him time, and he wasted none of it. One of the favourite jokes was that he was endeavouring to ingratiate himself with us, and by a strict attention to business to merit future patronage. We felt it very clever of him to elect to do this quietly, to occupy the position he had chosen for himself with such unobtrusiveness that no one could possibly object to him. This might

really have been the deepest craft. To have proved one's self an individual to whom no one can object on any pretext is really an enormous step in the direction of gaining a foothold. It is quite possible that he realized that the step he had taken had been somewhat premature; that to introduce himself to a family absorbed in study and foreign travel, and an elder brother, aged eighteen months, had not been entirely discreet, and that a general decorum of manner would be required to obliterate the impression that he had been somewhat inconsiderate.

His elder brother had decided to become a stately beauty, and after some indeterminate months had set up as premonitory symptoms large brown eyes, a deepening golden tinge of hair, and a distinguished and gracefully exclusive demeanour. His opinion of the newcomer was that he was an interloper. I think his private impression was that he was vulgar, also that he was fatuous and unnecessary. He used to stand by his nurse's knee when she held the intruder, and regard her with haughty reflection from under his eyelids. She had hitherto been his sole property, and her defection seemed to him to denote inferior taste and instability of character. On one occasion, after standing by her in disapproving silence for some time while he alternately looked at her and then at the white bundle on her knee, he waved his hand toward the grate, remarking with more dignity of demeanour than clearness of enunciation :

"F'ow him in 'er fire!"



"'F'ow him in 'er fire!'"—page 115.

We were sure that the new member of the family appreciated the difficulty of his position. We wondered if he had understood when he had heard us refer to him as the "Little Calamity." After a few days' acquaintance with him we were afraid he had, and felt a delicacy in using the term, which we had at first thought rather a good joke.

Dear Little Calamity, how often we have spoken of that misnomer since! From his first hour his actions seemed regulated by the peaceful resolve never to be in the way, and never to make anyone uncomfortable.

The unvarying serenity with which he devoted himself to absorbing as much nourishment as his small system would hold, and then sleeping sweetly for hours and most artistically assimilating it, was quite touching.

"Look at him," his mamma would say. "He is trying to insinuate himself. He intends to prove that he is really an addition, and that no family should be without him. But no family can have him," she burst forth in a very short time, "no family but ours. Nobody is rich enough to buy him. He has made his own price, and it is five hundred thousand million dollars!" When he had selected her as a parent he had probably observed that she was a susceptible person—peculiarly susceptible to the special variety of charms he had to offer. He had analyzed her weakness and his strength, and had known she was a fitting victim for his seductive arts.

The unflinchingness with which he applied himself to the fine art of infant fascination was really worth reflecting

upon. At thirty there are numerous methods by which a person may prove that he is worthy of affection and admiration, at three months his charms and virtues are limited to a good digestion, a tendency to somnolence and an unobtrusive temper. The new arrival did not obtrude upon us any ostentatiously novel attractions. He merely applied himself to giving his family the most superior specimens of the meritorious qualities his tender age was entitled to. He never complained of feeling unwell; he was generally asleep, and when he was awake he would lie upon his back without revolt for a much longer period than is submitted to usually by persons of his months. And when he did so he invariably wore the air of being engaged in sweet-tempered though profound reflection.

He had not seemed to regret being born in Paris, but he seemed agreeably impressed by America when he was taken there at the age of six weeks. Feeling himself restored to a land of Republican freedom he began to feel at liberty to unfold his hitherto concealed resources. He began by giving less time to sleep and more to agreeable, though inarticulate, conversation. He began to sit up and look around him with soft, shadowy and peculiarly thoughtful eyes. The expression—the dear little dreamy, reflective expression—of his eyes was his most valuable possession. It was a capital. It attracted the attention of his immediate relatives, and ensnared them into discussing his character and wondering what he was thinking of. His eyes were brown, and having heard

their colour remarked on in a complimentary manner, he, with great artistic presence of mind, stealthily applied himself to developing upon his hitherto bald head golden hair with a curl in it.

It was his mamma who first discovered this. She was lying upon a grassy slope playing with him and holding him up in the sunlight at arm's length; she saw in the brightness a sort of faint little nimbus of gold crowning him.

"Oh, the Lammie day!" she cried out. ("Lammie day" is not in the dictionary; it was a mere maternal inspiration.) "See what he is doing now! He is putting out a lovely little golden fuzz all over his head—and there is a tiny curl at the ends—like little duck tails! He has asked somebody, or something; perhaps a fairy, what kind of hair I like with brown eyes, and he is doing it on purpose." It seemed not improbable that on inquiring into her character before selecting her he had grounded himself thoroughly in the matter of her tastes, and had found that an insistent desire for a certain beauty in the extremely young was one of her weaknesses also.

From his earliest hours he considered her. He had not anticipated walking alone at nine months old, but in their intimate moments he discovered she had really set her heart upon his doing so.

"Your brother walked alone beautifully when he was nine months old," she would remark, "and if you wait until you

are ten months old I shall feel that you have dishonoured your family and brought my reddish hair with sorrow to the grave."

This being the case, he applied himself to making determined, if slow, little pilgrimages upon the carpet on his hands and knees. His reward was that the first time he essayed this he was saluted with cries of adulation and joy, notwithstanding the fact that his attempt was rather wobbly in character, and its effect was marred by his losing his balance and rolling over in a somewhat ignominious manner.

"He is creeping!" his mamma said. "He has begun to creep! He is going to walk as soon as Lionel did!" and everything available in the form of an audience was gathered together in the room to exult with acclamations over the enrapturing spectacle of a small thing dragging its brief white frock and soft, plump body, accompanied and illuminated by a hopeful smile, over a nursery carpet.

"He is so original!" his unprejudiced parent exclaimed, with fine discrimination. "He's creeping, of course, and babies have crept before, but he gives it a kind of air, as if he had invented it, and yet was quite modest."

Her discrimination with regard to his elder brother had been quite as fine. There were even persons who regarded her as being prejudiced by undue affection. It has never been actually proved that the aspirant for pedestrian honours had privately procured a calendar and secreted it for daily

reference as to the passage of time, but if this were not the case, it was really by a rather singular coincidence that the day before his ninth month was completed he arrested his creeping over the carpet, and dragging himself up by a chair to a standing position, covered himself with glory by staggering, flushed, uncertain, but triumphant, at least six steps across the floor unaided and alone.

He was snatched up and kissed until he was breathless. He was ruffled and tumbled with delightful little shakes and ecstatic little hugs. He bore it all with the modest composure of a conqueror who did not deign trivial airs and graces. His cheeks were warm and pink; he made no remark whatever, but there was in his eyes a soft, coy little smile which only a person of his Machiavelian depth of character could have accomplished. By that time, by adroit machinations and an unbounded knowledge of human weakness, he had assured his position in the respectable family of which he had chosen to become a member. It would have been impossible to oust him, or to work upon the feelings of his relatives in any such manner as would have induced them to listen for a moment to any animadversions upon his conduct. His eyelashes, his indefinite features, his totter, his smile were considered to become matters of the most thrilling national importance. On the magnificent occasion when he first decided to follow his mamma upstairs, and consequently applied himself to the rather prolonged and serious athletic task of creeping up step by step on his dusty little

hands and soft knees, and electrifying her by confronting her when she turned and saw him, with a sweetly smiling and ardent little upturned face, on that occasion it seemed really that it could only be by the most remarkable oversight that there were not columns of editorials on the subject in the *London Times*.

"They write about the passing of Bills in Parliament," his parent remarked, "and about wars and royal marriages, why don't they touch on things of really vital importance?" It was at this period of existence that his papa was frequently distracted in moments of deep absorption in scientific subjects by being implored to leave his essay upon astigmatism and fix his attention upon his offspring.

"Don't waste him!" he was besought. "He could not possibly keep up this degree of fascination always. He might grow out of it, and then just think how you would feel when you reflected that you had read medical books when you might have been watching him pretending to be looking at pictures. He ought to be economized every moment!"

But the most charming feature of his character was that his knowledge of the possession of glittering accomplishments, which were innumerable, never betrayed him into forgetting his attitude toward the entire world was one of the most perfect good fellowship. When he was spoken to he smiled, when he was kissed, even by unprepossessingly

familiar persons, he always comported himself with graceful self-control and dignity. The trying fact, which I am sure was more apparent to no one than to himself, that there were individuals whose idea of entertaining him was to make blatant idiots of themselves, was never resented by him openly. When they uttered strange sounds and poked his soft cheeks, or tumbled him about in an unseemly manner, it was his habit to gaze at them with deep but not disdainful curiosity and interest, as if he were trying to be just toward them and explain to himself their point of view.

"It really must be rather fatiguing to him not to be able to express himself," was his mamma's opinion. "He has evidently so many opinions in reserve."

He was so softly plump, he was so sweet-tempered, he was so pretty! One forgot all about his early English sister Vivien. It was as if she had never been contemplated for a moment. The word "calamity" was artfully avoided in conversation. One felt unworthy, and rather blushed if one caught sight of it in literature. When he invented a special little habit of cuddling up to his mamma in a warm, small heap, and in his sleep making for her a heavenly downy necklace of both his arms, with his diminutive palms locked together to hold her prisoner through the night, she began to feel it quite possible that his enslaving effect upon her might be such as to enfeeble an intellect never of the most robust. But

she knew him by this time well enough to realize that it would be useless to rebel, and that she might as well succumb.

She succumbed more and more as the days went by. But she also observed that everybody else succumbed. While making the most of his mental charms and graces he gave a great deal of attention to his physical attractions. It was believed that he concentrated his attention upon his hair. He encouraged it to develop from the golden fuzz into a golden silk, from the tiny duck tails to shining rings, from rings to a waving aureole, from the aureole to an entrancing mop of yellow, which tumbled over his forehead and gave his up-looking eyes a prettiness of expression.

And how like him it was to make a point of never objecting to have this wayward, though lovely growth brushed. What a *supplice* he might have made of the ceremony for his family if he had resented it and rebelled. But, on the contrary, it was believed that he seized upon the opportunity offered by it to gild the refined gold of his amiability of disposition as it were. Speaking as a person with some knowledge of the habits of the extremely young, I should say that there may be numbers of maternal parents who will scarcely believe that one of the most enchanting hours of the day was a certain time in the morning when he leaned against his mamma's knee and gave himself up to engaging conversation while his tangles

were being taken out. He made not the slightest objection to being curled and brushed and burnished up and made magnificent. His soft, plump body rested confidently against the supporting knee, and while the function proceeded he devoted himself to agreeable remark and analytical observation.

There was an expression of countenance it was his habit to wear at such times which was really a matter of the finest art. It combined philosophic patience, genial leniency, and a sweet determination to make the very best of a thing which was really beautiful to behold. It was at these times that a series of nursery romances, known as "The Hair-Curling Series," was invented and related. They were notable chiefly for good, strong dramatic colouring, and their point was the illustration of the useful moral that little boys with a great deal of beautiful curly hair are naturally rewarded—if they are always good when it is brushed—by delightful adventures, such as being played with by fairies and made friends with by interesting wild animals, whose ravenous propensities are softened to the most affectionate mildness by the sight of such high-mindedness in tender youth. There was one story, known as "The Good Wolf," which lasted for months and was a never-ending source of delight, as it rejoiced in features which could be varied to adapt themselves to any circumstance or change of taste in playthings. It was the laudable habit of the good wolf to give presents to little boys who were deserving, besides taking them

delightful rides in a little sleigh, and one could vary the gifts and excursions to an unlimited extent. Another, known as "The Mournful Story of Benny," was a fearful warning, but ended happily, and as it was not of a personal nature was not disapproved of, and was listened to with respectful and sympathizing interest, though "The Good Wolf" was preferred.

A delightfully intelligent little expression, and an occasional dear little gurgling laugh when the best points were made, convinced me that the point of view of the listener had an appreciation of the humour between the lines quite as clear in a four-year-old way as that of the relater of the incidents. He revelled in the good wolf, and was concerned by the misfortunes of Benny, who had brought tragedy upon himself by being so lost to all sense of virtue as to cut off his curls; but he knew they were highly-coloured figures, and part of a subtle and delightful joke.

But long before this he had learned to talk, and it was then that we were introduced to the treasures of his mind.

What was the queer little charm which made everyone like him so much, which made everyone smile when he looked at them, which made everyone listen when he spoke, which made arms quite involuntarily close around his small body when he came within reach?

The person who made the closest study of his character

devoted five or six years to it before she was quite sure what this charm consisted in. Then she decided that it was formed of a combination of fortunate characteristics, which might have lost all their value of fascination but for their being illumined by the warmth and brightness of a purely kind little heart full of friendliness to the whole world.

He was pretty, but many little boys were pretty ; he was quaint and amusing, but so are many scores. The difference between this one tiny individuality and others was that he seemed to have been born without sense of the existence of any barrier between his own innocent heart and any other.

I think it had never occurred to him that anyone could possibly be unfriendly or unloving to him. He was a perfectly human little thing, not a young cherub, but a rational baby, who made his frocks exceedingly dirty, and rejoiced sweetly in the making of mud pies. But, somehow, his radiant smile of belief in one's sympathy, even with his mud pies, minimized the trouble of contending with the earthly features of him.

His opinion evidently was that the world was made of people who loved him and smiled if they saw him, of things one could play with, and stories one could listen to, and of friends and relations who were always ready to join in the play and tell the stories. He went peacefully to the curl-brushing ordeal, perhaps, because of this confiding sureness

that any hand that dealt with him would touch him tenderly. He never doubted it.

One morning, before he was three years old, he trotted into the dining-room with a beautifully preoccupied expression, evidently on business thoughts intent. The breakfast was over, but his mamma was still sitting at the table reading.

She heard the tiny pattering of feet coming down the hall before he entered. She had thought him with his nurse, but he appeared to be returning from some unusual expedition to the front door, which, as it was a warm, early summer morning, stood open.

She was always curious about his mental processes, and so when he trotted to the table with his absorbed air, and stood upon his tiptoes making serious efforts to gain possession of a long loaf of French bread, she regarded him with interest. He was so little and the roll of bread was so long, and his intentions to do something practical with it were so evident. Somehow one of his allurements was that he was always funny, and he was so, purely because his small point of view was always so innocently serious.

“What does mamma’s baby want?” she asked.

He looked at her with an air of sweet good faith, and secured the bread, tucking it in all its dignity of proportion under the very shortest possible arm.

“Lady,” he said, “lady, f’ont door—want b’ead.”



"'Lady,' he said, 'lady, f'ont door—want b'cad.'"—page 128.

And he trotted off with a simple security in the sense of doing the right and only admissible thing, which it was reposeful to behold.

His mamma left her book hurriedly and trotted after him. Such a quaint baby figure he was with the long French roll under his arm! And he headed straight for the front door.

Standing upon the top step was an exceedingly dilapidated and disreputable little negro girl with an exceedingly dirty and broken basket on her arm. This basket was intended to contain such scraps of food as she might beg for. She was grinning a little, and at the same time looking a little anxious as the baby came toddling to her, the sun on his short curls, the loaf under his short arm.

He dropped the loaf into her basket with sweet friendliness.

"B'ead, lady," he said.

And as she scurried away he turned to smile at his approaching mamma with the confidence of a two-year-old angel.

"Lady, b'ead," he remarked succinctly, and the situation was explained.

The dirty little coloured girl was a human thing in petticoats, consequently she was a lady. His tender mind saw no other conclusion to be arrived at. She had expressed a desire for bread. On his mamma's breakfast-table there was a beautiful long loaf. Of course it must be given

to her. The question of demand and supply was so easily settled, so he trotted after the bread. The mere circumstances of short legs and short arms did not deter a spirit like his.

And it was this simple and unquestioning point of view which made him adorable.



CHAPTER II.

IN WHITE FROCK AND SASH.



IN the drawing-room, in full war paint of white frock and big sash, he was the spirit of innocent and friendly hospitality, in the nursery he was a brilliant entertainment, below stairs he was the admiration and delight of the domestics. The sweet temper which prompted him to endeavour to sustain agreeable conversation with the guest who admired him led him, also, to enter into friendly converse with the casual market-man at the back door, and to entertain with lively anecdote and sparkling repartee the extremely stout coloured cook in the kitchen. He endeavoured to assist her in the performance of her more arduous culinary duties, and by his sympathy and interest sustained her in many trying moments. When he was visiting her department chuckles and giggles might be heard issuing from the kitchen when the door opened. Those who heard them always knew that they were excited by the moral or social observations

or affectionate advice and solace of the young but distinguished guest.

"Me an' Carrie made that pudding," he would kindly explain at dinner. "It's a very good pudding. Carrie's such a nice cook. She lets me help her."

And his dimples would express such felicity, and his eyes beam from under his tumbling love locks with such pleasure at his confidence in the inevitable rapture of his parents at the announcement of his active usefulness, that no one possessed sufficient strength of mind to correct the grammatical structure of his remarks.

There is a picture—not one of Mr. Birch's—which I think will always remain with me. It is ten years since I saw it, but I see it still. It is the quaint one of a good-looking, stout, coloured woman climbing slowly up a back staircase with a sturdy little fellow on her back, his legs astride her spacious waist, his arms clasped round her neck, his lovely mop of yellow hair tumbling over her shoulder, upon which his cheek affectionately and comfortably rests.

It does not come within the province of cooks to toil up stairs with little boys on their backs, especially when the little boys have stout little legs of their own, and are old enough to wear Jersey suits and warlike scarfs of red; but in this case the carrying upstairs was an agreeable ceremony, partly jocular and wholly affectionate, engaged in by two confidants, and the bearer enjoyed it as much as did her luxurious burden.

“We’re friends, you know,” he used to say. “Carrie’s my friend and Dan’s my friend, Carrie’s such a kind cook and Dan’s such a nice waiter.”

That was the whole situation in a nutshell. They were his friends, and they formed together a mutual admiration society.

His conversation with them we knew was enriched by gems of valuable and entertaining information. Among his charms was his desire to acquire information, and the amiable readiness with which he imparted it to his acquaintances. We gathered that while assisting in the making of pudding he was lavish in the bestowal of useful knowledge. Intimate association and converse with him had revealed to his mamma that there was no historical, geographical or scientific fact which might not be impressed upon him in story form, and fill him with rapture. Monsoons and typhoons, and the crossing of the Great Desert on camels he found absorbing; the adventures of Romulus and Remus and their good wolf, and the founding of Rome held him spellbound. He found the vestal virgins and their task of keeping up the sacred fires in the temple sufficiently interesting to be made into a species of dramatic entertainment during his third year. It was his habit to creep out of his crib very early in the morning, and entertain himself agreeably in the nursery until other people got up. One morning his mamma, lying in her room, which opened into the nursery, heard a suspicious sound of unlawful poking at the fire.

"Vivvie," she said, "is that you?"

The poking ceased, but there was no reply. Silence reigned for a few moments, and then the sound was heard again.

"Vivian," said his anxious parent, "you are not allowed to touch the fire."

Small, soft feet came pattering hurriedly into the room; round the footboard of the bed a ruffled head and seriously expostulatory little countenance appeared.

"Don't you know," he said with an air of lenient remonstrance, "don't you *know* I's a westal wirgin?"

It would be impossible to explain him without relating anecdotes. Is there not an illustration of the politeness of his demeanour and the grace of his infant manners in the reply renowned in his history, made at the age of four, when his mamma was endeavouring to explain some interesting point in connection with the structure of his small, plump body? It was his habit to ask so many searching questions that it was necessary for his immediate relatives to endeavour to render their minds compact masses of valuable facts. But on this occasion his inquiries had led him into such unknown depths as were beyond him for the moment — only for the moment of course. He listened to the statement made, his usual engaging expression of delighted interest gradually becoming tinged with polite doubtfulness. When the effort at explanation was at an end he laid his hand

upon his mamma's knee with apologetic but firm gentleness.

"Well, you see," he said, "of course you know I *believe* you, dearest" (the most considerate stress was laid upon the "believe"), "but *ascuse* me," with infinite delicacy, "*ascuse* me, I do *not* think it is true."

The tender premonitory assurance that his confidence was unimpaired, even though he was staggered by the statement made, was so affectionately characteristic of him, and the apologetic grace of the "*ascuse* me, dearest," was all his own.

There might be little boys who were oblivious of, and indifferent to the attractions of simoons who saw no charm in the interior arrangements of camels, and were indifferent to the strata of the earth, but in his enterprising mind such subjects wakened the liveliest interest, and a little habit he had of suddenly startling his family by revealing to them the wealth of his store of knowledge by making casual remarks was at once instructive and enlivening.

"A camel has ever so many stomachs," he might sweetly announce while sitting in his high chair and devoting himself to his breakfast, the statement appearing to evolve itself from dreamy reflection. "It fills them with water. Then it goes across the desert and carries things. Then it isn't thirsty."

He was extremely pleased with the camel, and was most exhaustive in his explanations of him. It was not unlikely

that Carrie and Dan might have passed a strict examination on the subject of incidents connected with the crossing of the Great Desert. He also found his bones interesting, and was most searching in his inquiries as to the circulation of his blood. But he had been charmed with his bones from his first extremely early acquaintance with them, as witness an incident of his third year which is among the most cherished by his family of their recollections of him.

He sat upon his mamma's knee before the nursery fire, a small, round, delightful thing, asking questions. He had opened up the subject of his bones by discovering that his short, plump arm seemed built upon something solid, which he felt at once necessary to investigate.

"It is a little bone," his mamma said, "and there is one in your other arm, and one in each of your legs. Do you know," giving him a caressing little shake, "if I could see under all the fat on your little body I should find a tiny, weenty skeleton?"

He looked up enraptured. His dimples had a power of expressing delight never equalled by any other baby's dimples. His eyes and his very curls themselves seemed to have something to do with it.

"If you did," he said, "if you did *would you give it to me to play with?*"

He was a very fortunate small person in the fact that nature had been extremely good to him in the matter of combining his mental sweetness and quaintness with the

great charm of physical picturesqueness. All his little attitudes and movements were picturesque. When he stood before one to listen he fell unconsciously into some quaint attitude, when he talked he became ingenuously dramatic, when he sat down to converse he mentally made a droll or delightful and graceful little picture of himself. His childish body was as expressive as his glowing little face. Any memory of him is always accompanied by a distinct recollection of the expression of his face and some queer or pretty position which seemed to be part of his mental attitude. When he wore frocks his habit of standing with his hands clasped behind his back in the region of a big sash, and his trick of sitting down with a hand upon each of the plump knees, a brevity of skirt disclosed, were things to be remembered; when he was inserted into Jersey suits and velvet doublet and knickerbockers his manly little fashion of standing hands upon hips, and sitting in delicious, all unconsciously æsthetic poses were positively features of his character. What no dancing-master could have taught him his graceful, childish body fell into with entire naturalness, merely because he was a picturesque, small person in both body and mind.

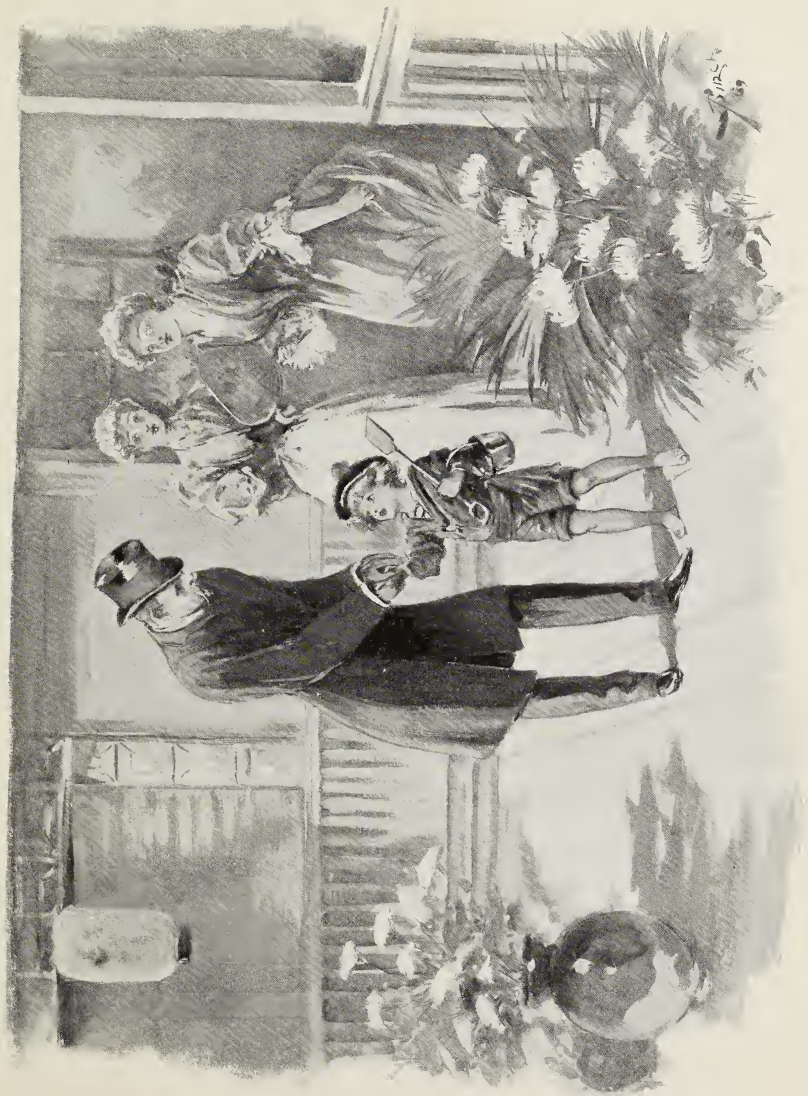
Could one ever forget him as he appeared one day at the seaside when coming up from the beach with his brief trousers rolled up to his stalwart little thighs? He stood upon the piazza, spade and bucket in hand, looking with deep, sympathetic interest at a male visitor who was on the

point of leaving the house. This visitor was a man who had recently lost his wife suddenly. He was a near relative of a guest in the house, and the young friend of all the world had possibly heard his bereavement discussed. But at six years old it is not the custom of small boys to concern themselves about such events. It seems that this one did, however, though the caller was not one of his intimates. He stood apart for a few moments looking at him with a tenderly reflective countenance. His mamma seeing his absorption privately wondered what he was thinking of. But presently he transferred both spade and bucket to one hand, and came forward holding out the other. I do not think anything could have been quainter and more sweet than the kind little face which uplifted itself to the parting guest.

"Mr. Wenham," he said, "I'm *very* sorry for you, Mr. Wenham, about your wife being dead. I'm very sorry for you. I know how you must miss her."

Even the sympathy of six years old does not go for nothing. There was a slight moisture in Mr. Wenham's eyes as he shook the small, sandy hand, and his voice was not quite steady as he answered, "Thank you, Vivvie, thank you."

It was when he was spending the summer at this place that he made the acquaintance of the young lady whose pony he regarded as a model of equine strength and beauty. It was the tiniest possible pony, whose duty it was to draw a small phaeton containing a small girl and her governess.



'I am VERY sorry for you, Mr. Wenhani, about your wife being dead.'—page 138.

But I was told it was a fine sight to behold the blooming little gentleman caller standing before this stately equipage, his hands on his hips, his head upon one side, regarding the steed with quite the experienced air of an aged jockey.

"That's a fine horse," he said. "You see it's got plenty of muscle. What I like is a horse with plenty of muscle."

And when we drove away from the cottage at the end of the summer, I myself perhaps a shade saddened, as one often is by the thought that the days of sunshine and roses are over, he put his small hand in mine and looked up at me wistfully.

"We liked that little house, didn't we, dearest?" he said. "We will always like it, won't we?"

"Do you know my friend Mrs. Wilkins?" he inquired one day when he was still small enough to wear white frocks, and not old enough to extend his explorations further than the part of the quiet street opposite the house he lived in.

"And who is your friend Mrs. Wilkins?" his mamma inquired.

"She is a very nice lady that saw me through her window when I was playing on the pavement, and we talked to each other, and she asked me to come into her house. She's such a kind lady, and she paints beautiful cups and saucers. She's my friend. And her cook is a nice lady too. She lives in the basemen', and she talks to me through the

window. She likes little boys. I have two friends in that house."

"My friend Mrs. Wilkins" became one of his cherished intimates. His visits to her were frequent and prolonged.

"I've just been to see my friend Mrs. Wilkins," he would say, or, "My friend Mrs. Wilkins' husband is very kind to me. We go to his store, and he gives me oranges."

It is not improbable that he also painted china during his calls upon his friend Mrs. Wilkins. It is certain that if he did not otherwise assist his attitude was that of an enthusiastic admirer of the art. That his conversation with the lady embraced many subjects we have evidence in an anecdote frequently related with great glee by those to whom the incident was reported. I myself was not present during the ingenuous summing up of the charm of social life, but I have always mentally seen him taking his part in the scene in one of his celebrated conversational attitudes, in which he usually sat holding his plump knee in a manner which somehow seemed to express deep, speculative thought.

"Are you in society, Mrs. Wilkins?" he inquired ingenuously.

"What *is* being in society, Vivvie?" Mrs. Wilkins replied, probably with the intention of drawing forth his views.

"It's—well—there are a great many carriages, you know, and a great many ladies come to see you. And they say

‘How *are* you, Mrs. Burnett? So glad to find you at home.’ Gabble, gabble, gabble, gabble. ‘*Good* morning!’ And they go away. That’s it.”

I am not quite sure that I repeat the exact phrasing, but the idea is intact, and the point which inspired the hearers with such keen joy was that he had absolutely no intention of making an unfriendly criticism. He was merely painting an impressionist’s picture. On his own part he was fond of society. It delighted him to be allowed to come into the drawing-room on the days when his mamma was “at home.” This function impressed him as an agreeable festivity. As he listened to the “gabble, gabble, gabble,” he beamed with friendly interest. He admired the ladies, and regarded them as beautiful and amiable. It was his pleasure to follow the departing ones into the hall and render them gallant assistance with their wraps.

“I like ladies, dearest,” he would say. “They are so pretty.”

At what age he became strongly imbued with the staunchest Republican principles it would be difficult to say. He was an unflinching Republican.

“My dearest Mamma,” he wrote me in one of the splendid epistolary efforts of his earliest years,—

“I am sorry that I have not had time to write to you before. I have been so occupied with the presidential election. The boys in my school knock me down and jump on me because they want me to go Democrat. But I am

still a strong Republican. I send you a great many hugs and kisses.

"Your obedient and humble son and servant,

"VIVIAN."

He was given to inventing picturesque terminations to his letters, and he seemed particularly pleased with the idea of being my humble or obedient son and servant. The picture the letter brought to my mind of a flushed and tumbled but staunch little Republican engaged in a sort of kindergarten political tussle with equally flushed and tumbled little Democrats wore an extremely American aspect. Figuratively speaking, he plunged into the thick of the electioneering fray. He engaged in political argument upon all available occasions. Fortunately for his peace of mind, Carrie and Dan favoured the Republican party. Dan took him to see Republican torchlight processions, and held him upon his shoulders while he waved his small hat, his hair flying about his glowing face while he shouted himself hoarse. No unworthy party cry of "'Rah for Hancock!" went unanswered by the clarion response. At the sound of such a cry in the street the nursery windows flew open with a bang, and two ecstatic Republicans (himself and brother) almost precipitated themselves into space shouting "'Rah for Garfield!" Without such precautions he felt his party would be lost. I think he was six when he discovered that he was a supporter of the movement in favour of female

suffrage. It was rather a surprise to us when this revealed itself, but his reasons were of such a serious and definite nature that they were arguments not to be refuted.

When he gave them he was leaning against a window-ledge in a room in a seaside home, his hands in his red sash, his countenance charming with animation.

"I believe they ought to be allowed to vote if they like it," he said, "'cause what should we do if there were no ladies? Nobody would have any mothers or any wives."

"That is true," his maternal audience encouraged him by saying. "The situation would be serious."

"And nobody could grow up," he proceeded. "When anyone's a baby, you know, he hasn't any teeth, and he can't eat bread and things. And if there were no ladies to take care of him when he was very first born he'd die. I think people ought to let them vote if they want to."

This really seemed so to go to the root of things that the question appeared disposed of.

One laughed, and laughed at him. All his prettiness was quaint, and so innocent that its unconsciousness made one smile. Only sometimes—quite often—while one was smiling one was queerly touched and stirred.

What a picture of a beautiful, brave little spirit, aflame with young, young fervour, he was the day I went into a room and found him reading for the first time in his brief life the story of the American Revolution.

He sat in a large chair, one short leg tucked under him, a

big book on his knee, his love locks tumbling over his ecstasized child face. He looked up glowing when I entered. His cheeks were red, his eyes were beautiful.

"Dearest," he said, "dearest, listen. *Here's* a brave man, here's a brave man! This is what he says, 'Give me liberty or give me death!'" It was somehow so movingly incongruous. This "pretty page with dimpled chin," stirred so valiantly by his "liberty or death." I kissed his golden thatch, laughing and patting it; but a little lump was in my throat.

Where did he learn—faithful and tender heart—to be such a lover as he was? Surely no woman ever had such a lover before! What taught him to pay such adorable, childish court, and to bring the first fruits of every delight to lay upon one shrine? In the small garden where he played—a toddling thing accumulating stains of grass and earth in truly human fashion on his brief white frock—the spring scattered sparsely a few blue violets. How he applied himself to searching for them, to gather them with pretty laboriousness until he had collected a small, warm handful, somewhat dilapidated before it was large enough to be brought upstairs in the form of a princely floral gift.

It is nearly fourteen years since they were first laid at my feet—these darling little grubby handfuls of exhausted violets—but I can hear yet the sound of the small feet climbing the staircase stoutly but carefully, the exultant voice shouting at intervals all the way up from the first flight, "Sweet dearest!

Sweet de-ar-est! I got somefin' for you! Please le' me in."

So many beautiful names had been tried by turns by himself and brother, but they found "sweetest" and "sweet dearest" the most satisfactory. Finally they decided upon "dearest" as combining and implying the sentiment they were inspired by.

There was in a certain sacred workroom at the top of the house a receptacle known as the "treasure drawer." It was always full of wonderful things, rich gifts brought carefully and with lavish generosity from the grass in the back yard, from dust heaps, from the street, from anywhere; bits of glass or pebble, gorgeous advertising cards, queerly-shaped twigs or bits of wood, pictures out of papers, small, queer toys, possessing some charm which might make them valuable to an appreciative maternal relative. And just before they were presented I always heard the small feet on the stairs, the knock on the door, and the delightful, confiding voice outside,—

"Please may I come in? I've brought a treasure for you, dearest."

We always spoke of them as "treasures." They seemed so beautiful and valuable to the donor that love brought them at once as a gift to love, and the recipient saw them with his eyes.

The very first bud which appeared on the old-fashioned rose-bushes at the back of the house was watched for and discovered when it was a tiny, hard, green thing.

"There's a bud," he would say, "and I'm watching till it is a rose, so that I can give it to you."

There is nothing so loving as a child who is loved. What valuable assistance he rendered in the matter of toilette. How charmed he was with any pretty new thing. How delighted to be allowed to put on slippers or take them off, stand by the dressing-table and hand pins, and give the benefit of his admiring advice. And how adorable it was to come home late from a party and find the pin-cushion adorned with a love-letter scrawled boldly in lead pencil and secured by a long pin. In conjunction with his brother—who was the troubadour of love from his infancy, and who has a story of his own—he invented the most delightful surprises for those late returns. Sometimes pieces of candy wrapped in paper awaited the arrival, sometimes *billets doux*, sometimes singular rhymes courageously entitled, "A Valentine." The following was the fine flower of all :—

"MY MAMA.

"O my sweetest little mama,
Sweteness that can ne'er be told
Dwells all decked in glory behind thy bosom folds.
In love and tender sweteness
Thy heart has no compare
And as through the path of sorrow
Thy heart goes wangering on
Thow always lend a helping hand
To all who are alone.

"ESEX ESSEX."

“What does ‘Essex’ mean, darling?” I asked.

“I don’t know what it means,” he said sweetly, “and I didn’t spell it right at first. But you know when anyone writes poetry they nearly always put another name at the end, and I thought Essex would do.” He was so desirous of making it complete!



CHAPTER III.

IN BOYHOOD AND NOW.



S a travelling companion what a success he was! How he made friends in the train, at railway stations, on steamers. How, if one lost sight of him for a moment, he invariably reappeared full of delight with the information that he had "found a friend."

As I was struggling in the usual manner up the crowded gangway of an ocean steamer on one occasion his flushed and radiant countenance appeared over the rail where he had climbed.

"Dearest, dearest," he said, "I've found a friend. He's a French gentleman and can't speak English."

He had found him on the tug, and they had apparently sworn eternal amity between the wharf and the steamer, though how this had been accomplished I was never quite able to determine, as he had only just begun to attack valiantly a verb or so of the first conjugation. But with the assistance of "donner," "aller," "aimer," and a smile like his nothing was impossible.

His circle of acquaintances during an ocean voyage was choice and large. And one languid passenger lying in her steamer chair with cushions behind her and fur robes over her was never passed without the affectionate, inquiring smiles of a protector, and at intervals through all the day he presented himself to "look after" her.

"Are you all right, dearest?" he would say. "Do you want your feet tucked in? Did the deck-steward bring you your lunch? Are your cushions comfortable?" And these matters being attended to he would kiss her gaily and run off to explore engines, or gather valuable information about walking beams.

On several occasions he and his brother made some rather long railway journeys alone. It was quite safe to send them. If they had not been able to take care of themselves half the world would have taken care of them. Conductors conversed with them, passengers were interested in them, and they arrived at the end of their travels laden with tribute. After one such journey taken together between Washington and Boston with what joy they performed their toilettes through an entire summer, with the assistance of a large box of wonderful soaps and perfumes sent to them by an acquaintance made *en voyage*.

"He was Lionel's friend," Vivian explained. "I think he said he was a drummer. He was so nice to us. My friend that I made was a professor in a college, I believe, and he gave me this to remember him by."

"This" was a pretty nugget of gold, and was accompanied by a card, on which the donor had written the most affectionately kind things of the pleasure he had had in his brief acquaintance with his young travelling companion, whose *bonne mine* he should not soon forget.

One could always be quite sure that he would give no trouble during a journey, that he would always be ready to perform any service, that no railroad nor ocean boat official could withstand him when he presented himself with a smiling request.

It is easy to call to mind, at any moment, some memory of him, his face flushed, his hair damp on his forehead, his eyes courageous, as he struggled with something too big for him he had felt it his duty to take charge of, as he swayed with the crowd down the gangway of some steamer at Southampton or some *paquebot* at Calais.

"It is too heavy for you, darling," one would say. "You look so hot. Let me carry it."

"Oh, no," would be his valiant answer. "I'm all right, dearest. It's rather a warm day, but a boy doesn't mind being warm."

Even foreign languages did not appal him.

"I'm only a little boy, you know," he would say, cheerfully. "It doesn't matter if it does sound funny, just so that they understand me. I like to talk to them."

So he conversed with Annunciata in the kitchen and Luigi in the dining-room, as it had been his habit to converse with

Carrie and Dan years before, for by this time his love-locks had been cropped and had changed to brown; but he still remained the same charming and engaging little person.

"Boys are sometimes a great trouble," commented Luigi, in referring to him and his brother, "but these—they are little *signorini*."

Fauntleroy had "occurred" nearly four years before the time when he exhausted all the resources of the Paris Exposition; but it was still Fauntleroy, though a taller one in schoolboy suit and Eton collar, and shorn of his *boucles blonde*, who marched off at nine o'clock every morning for two weeks, and spent the day exploring the treasures of the Exhibition. Sometimes he was quite alone, sometimes he had appointments with some "friends" he had made in the passage from New York to Havre—three interesting men whose connection with the electrical exhibit inspired him with admiration and delight. My impression is that they did not speak French, and that it enraptured him to place his vocabulary at their disposal.

"They are so kind to me, dearest," he said, just as he had said it at three years old when he visited his "friend Mrs. Wilkins."

"It must be an entertaining spectacle," I often thought, "to see him walk into the restaurant quite unattended, order his little *déjeuner à la fourchette*, dispose of it in dignified solitude at a small table, and present the *garçon* with a *pourboire* as if he were forty. I should like to be a spectator

from afar. No doubt the waiters know him and make jocular remarks among themselves."

But it was when he was only seven that Fauntleroy really occurred. He had been so amusing and interesting that summer, and I had reflected upon him so much. Every few days I heard some delightful anecdote about him, or saw him do something incomparably quaint. What led me most into speculation was the effect he invariably produced upon people, touching little fascinations he exercised.

"Do you know I never saw a child like him?" said a clever man of the world who had spent an hour talking to him.

And curiously enough it was exactly the idea expressed by an old coloured aunty years before.

"Dat chile," she said, "he suttanly ain't like no other chile. 'Tain't jest dat he's smart—though cose he's smart, smart as they make 'em. It's sump'n else. An' he's the frien'liest little human I ever seed—he suttanly is!"

I had been ill that year and the year before it, and of that illness I have many memories which are beautiful and touching things. One is of many disturbed and weary nights when the door of my room opened quietly and a little figure entered; such an adorable little figure, in a white night-gown, and with bright hair tumbled by sleep falling about a serious small face.

"I've come to take care of you, dearest," he would say with his indescribable protecting and comforting air. "I'll sit by you and make you go to sleep."

And somehow there seemed to emanate from his childish softness a sort of soothing which could not have been put into words.

It was his special province to put me to sleep when I was restless. He assumed it as a sacred duty, and had the utmost confidence in his power to do it.

"I'll put you to sleep," he would say. "I will just sit by you and hold your hand and make you quiet."

How long had he sat by me on that one night which I shall always remember? I do not know. But he had been so quiet and had sat holding my hand so long that I could not find it in my heart to let him know that the charm had not worked and that I was not really asleep. I pretended that I was, lying very still and breathing with soft regularity.

He stayed quite a long time after I knew he thought I was quiet for the night, he was so determined to be quite sure that nothing would disturb me. At last he began with the most cautious softness to take his hand away. When he had been a baby I had sometimes laid him down to sleep with just such cautious movement. How gradually and softly the small fingers released themselves one by one, how slowly, with what infinite precaution of slowness the warm, kind little palm was detached from mine. Then there was a mysterious, careful movement, and I knew he was leaving his chair. I dared not open my eyes for fear he would see me and be heartbroken because I was awake. What was he doing? There were no footsteps, and yet he was moving a

little—a very little it seemed. And the movement was so slow and interrupted by such pauses that the length of time it lasted added to my curiousness. What idea had he been inspired by? Whatsoever he was doing he was putting his entire soul into, and he should not be crushed by the thought that it was all in vain. When I could hear that he had reached the door I opened an eye very cautiously. The opening of the door was as clever and quiet as the mysterious movement. It was opened only a little, there was more careful movement, and then it was drawn to. But though I had been looking directly at the slip of light I had not seen him. Somehow he had passed through without coming within my line of vision.

I lay mystified. The incomprehensibleness of it gave me something to think about. His room was near my own, and I knew that he went to it and got into bed. I knew, also, that he would be asleep as soon as his curly head touched the pillow.

He had been asleep perhaps an hour when his brother came in. He had been spending the evening at the house of a friend. He was usually a tender and thoughtful thing himself, but this night the excitement of festivity had intoxicated him and made him forgetful. He came up the staircase and ran into the bedroom with a childish rush.

Exactly what happened I could only guess at. I had reason to suppose that my young protector and medical attendant was wakened with some extra sense of flurry

taking place. He evidently sat up in bed in reproachful despair.

"What have I done?" said his brother. "What is the matter?"

I heard tears in the plaintive little voice that answered—actual tears.

"Oh!" he said. "I know you've wakened her! I know you have! It was so hard to get her to sleep. And at last I did, and then I was so afraid of wakening her that I went down on the floor and crawled out of the room on my hands and knees. And I think it took an hour."

"Darling," I murmured in the drowsiest possible tone when he crept into the room to look at me, "I've had a lovely sleep, and I'm going to sleep again. You made me so quiet." But with the most serious difficulty I restrained myself from clutching him in my arms with a force which would have betrayed to him all my adoring duplicity.

It was things such as these I remembered when he was so deliciously amusing, and I heard stories of him every day.

Sometimes when swinging in my hammock on the piazza I caught sight of him flying on his small bicycle down the tree-shaded avenue, a delightful, animated picture, his strong, graceful child body beautifully defined in his trim, close-fitting Jersey suit, his red scarf and fez brilliant touches of colour, his waving, flying hair brightened to gold as he darted through the sunshine and into the shade. I used to say to myself:

"He is so good to look at! He is so pretty; that is why every one likes him so." And then when I heard him say some quaint thing which was an actual delight through its droll ingenuousness, I said: "It is because he is so amusing!"

So I studied him day after day, often trying to imagine the effect his fearless candour and unsophisticated point of view would have upon certain persons who did not know his type.

I was convalescing from my long illness and had plenty of time to amuse myself with such speculations. He was such a patriotic young American; he was so engaged in an impending presidential election at the time; his remarks were so well worth hearing. I began, among other fancies about him, to imagine his making them with that frankly glowing face to conservative English people. He had English blood in his veins, and things more unheard of had occurred than that through a combination of circumstances he might be surrounded by things very new to him.

"When a person is a duke," he had said to me once, "what makes him one? What has he done?" His opinion evidently was, that dukedoms were a species of reward for superhuman sweetness of character and brilliant intellectual capacity. I began to imagine the interest that would be awakened in his mind by the contemplation of ducal personages.

It amused me to analyze the subject of what his point of

view would be likely to be. I knew it would be productive of immense entertainment to his acquaintances. I was sure that the duke would be subjected to sweet but searching cross-questioning, and that much lively interest would be felt in the subject of coronets. He would regard them as a species of eccentric hat. What questions he would ask, what enthusiasm he would display when he was impressed by things beautiful or stately and interesting! Would he seem "a cheeky little beggar" to less republican minds than his own? I asked myself this curiously. But no, I was sure he would not. He would be so simple; he would expect such splendour of mind and of noble friendliness that the hypothetical duke would like him as Dan and Carrie did, and he would end by saying "My friend, the Duke of Blankshire," as affectionately as he had said "My friend, the milkman."

It was only a thread of fancy for a while, but one day I had an idea.

"I will write a story about him," I said. "I will put him in a world quite new to him and see what he will do. How shall I bring a small American boy into close relationship with an English nobleman—irascible, conservative, disagreeable? He must live with him, talk to him, show him his small, unconscious republican mind. He will be more effective if I make him a child who has lived in the simplest possible way. Eureka! Son of younger son, separated from ill-tempered noble father because he has married a poor

young American beauty. Young father dead, elder brothers dead, boy comes into title! How it would amaze him and bewilder him! Yes, there it is, and Vivian shall be he—just Vivian with his curls and his eyes, and his friendly, kind, little soul. Little Lord Something-or-other. What a pretty title—Little Lord—, Little Lord—, what?”

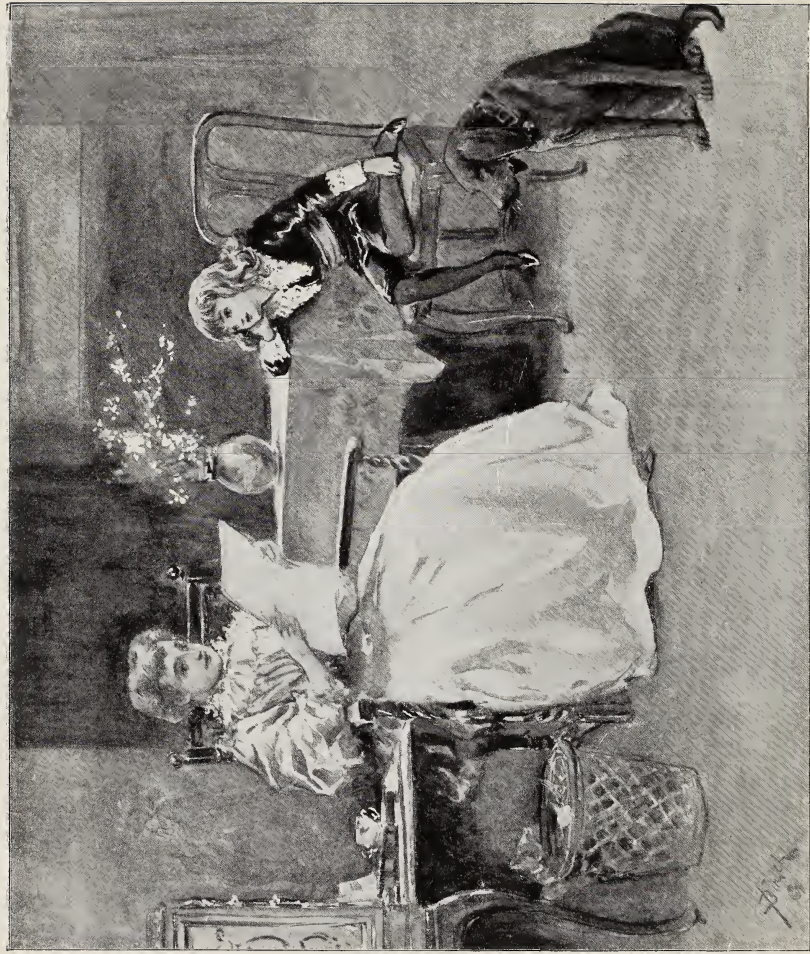
And a day later it was Little Lord Fauntleroy. A story like that is easily written. In part it was being lived before my eyes.

“I can wash myself quite well, thank you,” he would say, scrubbing vigorously one day. “I can do it quite well, dearest, if some one will just ’zamine the corners.”

He had always spoken very clearly, but there were a few words his pronounciation of which endeared them inexpressibly to me. On the evening of the day before “Fauntleroy” spent his first morning with “Lord Dorincourt” he brought into my room a parlour base-ball game to show me.

It was a lovely thing to see his delight over it, and to note the care with which he tried to make all technical points clear to an interested but unintelligent parent. What vigorous little attitudes he threw himself into when he endeavoured to show me how the ball was thrown in the real game!

“I’m afraid that I am a very stupid little mammy,” I said. “What does the first base do? And what is the pitcher for? I’m very dull, you see.”



"And how delightful it was to read the manuscript to him."—page 159.

"Oh, no!" he said. "No, you're not, dearest! It's me, you know. I'm afraid that I'm not a very good 'splainer. And besides, you are a lady, you know, and ladies don't play base-ball."

Almost every day I recorded something he had said or suggested.

And how delightful it was to read the manuscript to him and his brother. He used to sit in a large arm-chair holding his knee or with his hands in his pockets.

"Do you know," he said to me once, "I like that boy? There's one thing about him, he never forgets about dearest."

When the first appearance of the false claimant occurred he turned quite pale; so did his brother.

"Oh, dearest!" they gasped, "why did you do that? Oh, don't do it!"

"What will he do?" the occupant of the arm-chair asked. "Won't he, dearest, be the Earl's boy any more?"

"That other boy," said Fauntleroy tremulously, to Lord Dorincourt, the next day, "he will have to—to be your boy now—as I was—won't he?"

"No," answered the Earl, and he said it so fiercely that Cedric quite jumped.

"Shall I be your boy even if I'm not going to be an earl?" he said. "Shall I be your boy just as I was before?"

But it was a real little heart that had beaten at the thought.

He has been considered such an ideal little person—Cedric Errol, Lord Fauntleroy—and he was so real after all. Perhaps it is worth while explaining that he was only a simple, natural thing—a child, whose great charm was that he was the innocent friend of the whole world.

I have reason to believe that an impression exists that the passage of years has produced no effect whatever on the great original, that he has still waving, golden hair, and wears black velvet doublets and broad collars of lace. This is an error. He is sixteen. He plays football and tennis and battles sternly with Greek. He is anxious not to “flunk” in geometry, and his hair is exceedingly short and brown. He has a fine sense of humour, and his relatives consider it rather a good joke to present him to intimates, as he appears before them, looking particularly cheerful and robust, in the words first heard by Mr. Wenham :

“This is—‘Little Lord Fauntleroy.’”



LITTLE BETTY'S KITTEN TELLS
HER STORY



“‘Kitty I am nearly five o’clock.’”—see page 165.

LITTLE BETTY'S KITTEN TELLS HER STORY.



—♦—

AM Betty's kitten—at least I was Betty's kitten once. That was more than a year ago. I am not a kitten now, I am a little cat, and I have grown serious, and think a great deal as I sit on the hearth-rug, looking at the fire and blinking my eyes.

I have so much to think about that I even stop to ponder things over when I am lapping my milk or washing my face. I am very careful about lapping my milk. I never upset the saucer. Betty told me I must not. She used to talk to me about it when she gave me my dinner. She said that only untidy kittens were careless. She liked to see me wash my face, too, so I am particular about that. It is always Betty I am thinking about when I sit on the rug and blink at the fire. Sometimes I feel so puzzled and so anxious that if her mamma or papa are sitting near I look up at them and say :

"Mee-aiow ? Mee-aiow ?"

But they do not seem to understand me as Betty did. Perhaps that is because they are grown-up people and she was a little girl. But one day her mamma said :

"It sounds almost as if she were asking a question"

I was asking a question. I was asking about Betty. I wanted to know when she was coming back.

I know where she came from, but I do not know where she is gone, or why she went. She usually told me things, but she did not tell me that. I never knew her to go away before. I wish she had taken me with her. I would have kept my face and paws very clean, and never have upset my milk.

I said I knew where she came from. She came from behind the white rose-bush before it began to bloom, and when it had nothing but glossy green leaves and tight little buds on it.

I saw her! My eyes had only been open about two weeks, and I was lying close to my mother in our bed under the porch that was round the house. It was a nice porch, with vines climbing over it, and I had been born under it. We were very comfortable there, but my mother was afraid of people. She was afraid lest they might come and look at us. She said I was so pretty that they would admire me and take me away. That had happened to two or three of my brothers and sisters before their eyes had opened, and it had made my mother nervous. She said the same thing had

happened before when she had had families quite as promising, and many of her lady friends had told her that it continually happened to themselves. They said that people coming and looking at you when you had kittens was a sort of epidemic. It always ended in your losing children.

She talked to me a great deal about it. She said she felt rather less nervous after my eyes were opened, because people did not seem to want you so much after your eyes were opened. There were fewer disappearances in families after the first nine days. But she told me she preferred that I should not be intimate with people who looked under the porch, and she was very glad when I could use my legs and get farther under the house when any one bent down and said, "Pussy! pussy!" She said I must not get silly and flattered and intimate even when they said, "Pretty pussy, poo' 'ittle kitty puss!" She said it might end in trouble.

So I was very cautious indeed when I first saw Betty. I did not intend to be caught, but I was not so much afraid as I should have been if she had not been so very little and so pretty.

Not very long before she went away she said to me one day when we were in the swing together,—

"Kitty, I am nearly five o'clock!"

So when she came from behind the white rose-bush perhaps she was four o'clock.

I shall never forget that morning. It was such a beautiful morning. It was in the early spring, and all the world

seemed to be beginning to break into buds and blossoms. There were pink and white flowers on the trees, and there was such a delicious smell when one sniffed a little. Birds were chirping and singing, and every now and then darting across the garden. Flowers were coming out of the ground, too; they were blooming in the garden-beds and among the grass, and it seemed quite natural to see a new kind of flower bloom out on the rose-bush, which had no flowers on it then, because the season was too early. I was such a young kitten that I thought the little face peeping round the green bush was a flower. But it was Betty, and she was peeping at me! She had such a pink bud of a mouth, and such pink soft cheeks, and such large eyes, just like the velvet of a pansy blossom! She had a tiny pink frock and a tiny white apron with frills, and a pretty white muslin hat like a frilled daisy; and the soft wind made the curly soft hair falling over her shoulder as she bent forward sway as the vines sway.

"Mother!" I whispered, "what kind of a flower is that? I never saw one before."

She looked, and began to be quite nervous.

"Ah, dear! ah, dear!" she said, "it is not a flower at all, it is a person, and she is looking at you!"

"Ah, mother!" I said, "how can it be a person when it is not half as high as the rose-bush? And it is such pretty colours. Do look again."

"It is a child-person," she said, "and I have heard they are sometimes the worst of all—though I don't believe they

take so many away at a time." The little face peeped farther round the green of the rose-bush and looked prettier and prettier. The pink frock and white frills began to show themselves a little more.

"Get behind me," said my mother, and I began to shrink back.

Ah, how often I have wondered since then why I did not know in a minute that it was Betty—just Betty! It seemed so strange that I did not know it without being told. She came nearer and nearer, and her cheeks seemed to grow pinker and pinker, and her eyes bigger and bigger. Suddenly she gave a little jump and began to clap her hands and laugh.

"Ah," she said, "it is a little kitty. It is surely a little kitty."

"Oh, my goodness!" said my mother. "Fts—fts—ftss! Fftss—fftssss!"

I could not help feeling as if it was rather rude of her, but she was *so* frightened.

But Betty did not seem to mind it at all. Down she went on her little knees on the grass, bending her head down to peep under the porch until her cheek touched the green blades, and her heap of curls lay on the buttercups and daisies.

"Oh, you *dee'* little kitty!" she said. "Pretty pussy, pussy, puss! Kitty—kitty; *Poo* 'ittle kitty. I won't hurt you!"

She made a movement as if she were going to put out her dimpled hand to stroke me, but a side window opened, and I heard a voice call to her :

"Betty, Betty!" it said, "you mustn't put your hand under there. The pussy is frightened, and it makes her cross, and she might scratch you. Don't try to stroke her, dearie."

She turned her bright little face over her shoulder.

"I won't hurt her, mamma," she said. "I surely, surely won't hurt her. She has such a pretty kitty ; come and look at it, mamma!"

"Fftssss-s!" said my mother. "More coming! Grown-ups this time!"

"I don't believe they will hurt us," I said. "The little one is such a pretty one."

"You know nothing about it," said my mother.

But they did not hurt us. They were as gentle as if they had been kittens themselves. The mother came and bent down by Betty's side, and looked at us too, but they did nothing which even frightened us. And they talked in quite soft voices.

"You see she is a wild little pussy," the mother said. "She must have been left behind by the people who lived here before we came, and she has been living all by herself, and eating just what she could steal—or, perhaps, catching birds. Poor little cat! And now she is frightened because evidently some of her kittens have been stolen from her, and she wants to protect this one."

"But if I don't frighten her," said Betty, "if I keep coming to see her and don't hurt her, and if I bring her some milk and some bits of meat, won't she get used to me, and let her kitten come out and play with me after a while?"

"Perhaps she will," said the mother. "Poor pussy, puss, pussy, pretty pussy!"

She said it in such a coaxing voice that I quite liked her, and then Betty began to coax too, and she was so sweet and so like a kitten herself that I could scarcely help going a trifle nearer to her, and I found myself saying "Mee-ow" quite softly in answer.

And from that time we saw her every day ever so many times. She seemed never tired of trying to make friends with us. The first thing in the bright mornings we used to hear her pretty child-voice and see her pretty child-face. She used to bring saucers of delightful milk to us two or three times a day. And she always was so careful not to frighten us. She would just call us, "Pretty, pretty pussy; pretty kitty puss!" in a voice as soft as silk, and then she would put the saucer of milk near us and go away behind the rose-bush and let us drink in comfort and peace.

We thought at first that she went back to the house when she set the saucer down; but after a few days, when we were beginning to be rather less afraid, we found out that she just hid behind the rose-bush and peeped at us through the branches. I saw her pink cheeks and big soft pansy eyes one day, and I told my mother.

"Well, she is a well-behaved child-person," mother said. "I sometimes begin to think she does not mean any harm."

I was sure of it. Before I had lapped three saucers of milk I had begun to love her a little.

A few days later she just put the saucer down near us and stepped softly away, but stood right by the rose-bush without hiding behind it. And she said, "Pretty pussy—pussy!" so sweetly without moving towards us, that even my mother began to have confidence in her.

About that time I began to think it would be nice to creep out from under the house and get to know her a little better. It looked so pleasant and sunshiny out on the grass, and she looked so sunshiny herself. I did like her voice so, and I did like a ball I used to see her playing with; and when she bent down to look under the porch and her curls showing, I used to feel as if I should like to jump out and catch at them with my claws. There never was anything as pretty as Betty, or anything which looked as if it might be so nice to play with.

"I wish you would like me and come out and play, kitty," she used to say to me sometimes. "I do so like kitties! I never hurt kitties. I'll give you a ball of string."

There was a fence not far from the house, and it had a sort of ledge on top, and it was a good deal higher than Betty's head—because she was so very little. She was quite a little thing—only four o'clock.

So one morning I crept out from under my porch and

jumped on to the top of that fence, and I was there when she came again to peep and say, "Pretty pussy!" When she caught sight of me she began to laugh and clap her little hands and jump up and down.

"Oh, there's the kitty," she said. "There's my kitty. It has come out its own self. Kitty—kitty; pretty, pretty kitty!"

She ran to me, and stood beneath me looking up with her eyes shining and her pink cheeks full of dimples. She could not reach me, but she was so happy because I had come out that she could scarcely stand still. She coaxed and called me pretty names, and stood on her tip-toes stretching her short arm and dimpled hand to try to see if I would let her touch me.

"I won't pull you down, pussy," she said, "I only want to stroke you. Oh, you pretty kitty!"

And I looked down at her and said "Meeiou" gently, just to tell her that I wasn't very much afraid now, and that when I was a little more used to being outside instead of under the house perhaps I would play with her.

"Mee-iaou!" I said, and I even put out one paw as if I was going to give her a pat, and she danced up and down for joy.

My dear little Betty! I wish I could see her again. I *cannot* understand why she should go away when I loved her so much—and when everybody loved her so much.

Oh, how happy we were when I came down from the fence! I did it in three days. She brought some milk and coaxed me, and then she put it on the grass close to the fence and moved away a few steps and looked at me with such a pretty imploring look in her pansy eyes that suddenly I made a little leap down and stood on the grass and began to lap the milk, and even to purr! That was the beginning. From that time we played together always. And oh, what a delightful playmate Betty was! And such a conversationalist! She was not a child who thought you must not talk to a kitten because it could not talk back. She had so many things to tell me and to show me. And she showed me everything, and explained it all too. She had a playhouse in a box in a nice grassy, shady place, and she told me all about it, and showed me her teacups and her dolls, and we had tea-parties with bits of real cake and tiny cups with flowers on them.

"They don't hold much milk, kitty," she said; "but it's a dolls' tea-party, so you must pretend, and I'll give you a big saucerful afterwards."

I pretended as hard as ever I could, and it was a beautiful party, though I did not like the Sunday Doll, because she looked proud, and as if she thought kittens were too young. The Every-day Doll was much nicer, though her hair was a little tufty and she was cracked.

How Betty did enjoy herself that lovely sunny afternoon we had the first tea-party in the playhouse! How she

laughed and talked and ran backwards and forwards to her mamma for the cups of milk and bits of cake! I ran after her every time, and she was as happy as a little bird.

"See how the kitty likes me now, mamma," she said. "Just watch; it runs every time I run. It isn't afraid of me the leastest bit! Isn't it a pretty kitty?"

I never left her when I could help it. She was such fun. She was a child who danced about and played a great deal, and I was a kitten who liked to jump. We ran about and played with balls, and we used to sit together in the swing. I did not like the swing very much at first, but I was so fond of Betty that I learned to enjoy it because she held me on her knee and talked. She had such a soft cosy lap and such soft arms, that it was delightful to be carried by her. She was very fond of carrying me about, and she liked me to lay my head on her shoulder so that she could touch me with her cheek! My pretty little Betty, she loved me so!

She used to show me the flowers in the garden, and tell me which ones were going to bloom and what colour they would be. We were very much interested in all the flowers, but we cared most about the white rose-bush. It was so big and we were so little, that we could sit under it together, and we were always trying to count the little hard green buds, though there were so many that we never counted half of them. Betty could only count up to ten, and all we could do was to keep counting ten over and over.

"These little buds will grow so big soon," she used to

say, "that they will burst, and then there will be roses, and more roses, and we will make a little house under here and have a tea-party."

We were always going to look at that rose-bush, and sometimes, when we were playing and jumping, Betty would think she saw a bud beginning to come out, and we would both run.

I don't know how many days we were so happy together playing ball and jumping in the grass and watching the white rose-bush to see how the buds were growing. Perhaps it was a long time, but I was only a kitten, and I was too frisky to know about time. But I grew faster than the rose-buds did. Betty said so! But oh, how happy we were! If it could only have lasted perhaps I might never have grown sober and sat by the fire thinking so much.

One afternoon we had the most beautiful play we had ever had. We ran after the ball, we swung together. Betty knelt down on the grass and shook her curly hair so that I could catch at it with my paws, we had a tea-party on the box, and when it was over we went to the rose-bush and found a bud beginning to be a rose. It *was* a splendid afternoon!

After we had found the bud beginning to be a rose we sat down together under the rose-bush. Betty sat on the thick green grass, and I lay comfortably on her soft lap and purred.

"We have jumped so much that I am a little tired, and I



"She was lying under the white rose-bush, still asleep."—page 175.

feel hot," she said. "Are you tired, kitty? Isn't it nice under the rose-bush? and won't it be a beautiful place for a tea-party when all the white roses are out? Perhaps there will be some out to-morrow. We'll come in the morning and see!"

Perhaps she was more tired than she knew. I don't think she meant to go to sleep, but presently her head began to droop and her eyes to close, and in a little while she sank down softly and was quite gone.

I left her lap and crept up close to the breast of her little white frock, and curled up in her arm and lay and purred and looked at her while she slept. I did so like to look at her. She was so pretty and pink and plump, and she had such a lot of soft curls. They were crushed under her warm cheek and scattered on the grass. I played with them a little while she lay there, but I did it very quietly, so that I should not disturb her.

She was lying under the white rose-bush, still asleep, and I was curled up against her breast watching her, when her mamma came out with her papa and they found us.

"Oh, how pretty!" the mamma said. "What a lovely little picture! Betty and her kitten asleep under the white rose-bush, and just one rose watching over them. I wonder if Betty saw it before she dropped off. She has been looking at the buds every day to see if they were beginning to be roses."

"She looks like a rose herself," said her papa, "but it is a pink one. How rosy she is!"

He picked her up in his arms and carried her into the house. She did not waken, and as I was not allowed to sleep with her I could not follow, so I stayed behind under the rose-bush myself a little longer before I went to bed. When I looked at the buds I saw that there were several with streaks of white showing through the green, and there were three that I was sure would be roses in the morning, and I knew how happy Betty would be, and how she would laugh and dance when she saw them.

I often hear people saying to each other that they should like to understand the strange way I have of suddenly saying "Meeiaou! mee-iaou!" as if I was crying. It seems strange to me that they don't know what it means. I always find myself saying it when I remember that lovely afternoon when we played so happily and Betty fell asleep under the rose-bush, and I thought how pleased she would be when she came out in the morning.

I can't help it. Everything was so different from what I had thought it would be. Betty never came out in the morning. Oh dear! oh dear! she never came out again!

I got up early enough myself, and it was a beautiful, beautiful morning. There was dew on the grass and on the flowers, and the sun made it sparkle so that it was lovely to look at. I did so want Betty to see it. I ran to the white rose-bush, and sure enough there were four or five roses

—such white roses, and with such sparkling drops of dew on them.

I ran back to the house and called to Betty, as I always did. I wanted her to come.

But she did not come! She was not even at breakfast eating her bread-and-milk. I looked for her everywhere except in her bedroom. Her bedroom door was closed, and I could not get in.

And though I called and called, nobody seemed to take any notice of me. Somehow something seemed to be the matter. The house was even quieter than usual, but I felt as if every one was busy and in trouble. I kept asking and asking where Betty was, but nobody would answer me. Once I went to her closed bedroom door and called her there, and told her about the white roses, and asked her why she did not come out. But before I had really finished telling her my feelings were quite hurt by her papa. He came and spoke to me in a way that was not kind.

“Go away, kitty,” he said. “Don’t make such a noise, you will disturb Betty.”

I went away waving my tail. I went out into the garden and sat under the rose-bush. As if I could disturb Betty! As if Betty did not always want me! She wanted me to sleep with her in her little bed, but her mamma would not let me.

But—ah! how could I believe it?—she did not come out the next day, or the next, or even the next. It seemed as if

I should go wild. People can ask questions, but a little cat is nothing to anybody unless to some one like Betty. She always understood my questions and answered them.

In the house they would not answer me. They were always busy and troubled. It did not seem like the same house. Nothing seemed the same. The garden was a different place. In the playhouse the Sunday Doll and the Every-day Doll sat and stared at the teathings we had used that happy afternoon at the party. The Sunday Doll sat bolt upright and looked prouder than ever, as if she felt she was being neglected; but the Every-day Doll lopped over as if she had grieved her strength away because Betty did not come.

I had made up my mind at the first tea-party that I would never speak to the Sunday Doll, but one day I was so lonely and helpless that I could not help it.

"Oh dear!" I meeciaoued, "Oh dear! Do you know *anything* about Betty? Do you—*do* you?"

And that heartless thing only sat up and stared at me and never answered, though the tears were streaming down my nose.

What could a poor little cat do? I looked and looked everywhere, but I could not find her. I went round the house and round the house and called in every room. But they only drove me out, and said I made too much noise, and never understood a word I said.

And the white rose-bush—it seemed as if it would break

my heart. "There will be more roses, and more roses," Betty had said, and every morning it was coming true. I used to go and sit under it, and I had to count ten over and over and over, there were so many. It was such a great rose-bush that it looked at last like a cloud of snow-white bloom. And Betty had never seen it.

"Ah, Betty, Betty!" I used to cry when I had counted so many tens that I was tired. "Oh, do come and see how beautiful it is, and let us have our tea-party! Oh, White rose-bush, where is she?"

They drove me out of the house so many times that I had no courage, but one morning the white rose-bush was so splendid that I made one desperate effort. I went to the bedroom door and rubbed against it and called with all my strength.

"Betty, if you are there—Betty, if you love me at all, oh, speak to me and tell me what I have done! The white rose-bush has tens and tens and tens of flowers upon it. It is like snow. Don't you care about it? Oh, do come out and see! Betty, Betty, I am so lonely for you, and I love you so!"

And the door actually opened, and her mamma stood there looking at me with great tears rolling down her cheeks. She bent down and took me in her arms and stroked me.

"Perhaps she will know it," she said in a low strange voice to some one in the room. She turned and carried me

into the bedroom, and I saw that it was Betty's papa she had spoken to.

The next instant I sprang out of her arms on to the bed. Betty was there—my Betty!

It seemed as if I felt myself lose my senses. My Betty! I kissed her, and kissed her, and kissed her! I rubbed her little hands, her cheeks, her curls, I kissed her and purred and cried.

"Betty," said her mamma, "Betty, darling, don't you know your own little kitty?"

Why did not she? Why did she not? Her cheeks were hot and red, her curls were spread out over the pillow, her pansy eyes did not seem to see me, and her little head moved drearily to and fro.

Her mamma took me in her arms again, and as she carried me out of the room her tears fell on me.

"She does not know you, kitty," she said. "Poor kitty, you will have to go away."

I cannot understand it. I sit by the fire and think and think, but I cannot understand. She went away after that, and I never saw her again.

I have never felt like a kitten since that time.

I went and sat under the white rose-bush all day, and slept there all night.

The next day there were more roses than ever, and I made up my mind that I would try to be patient and stay

there and watch them until Betty came to see. But two or three days after, in the fresh part of the morning, when everything was loveliest, her mamma came out walking slowly straight towards the bush. She stood still a few moments and looked at it, and her tears fell so fast that they were like dew on the white roses as she bent over. She began to gather the prettiest buds and blossoms one by one. Her tears were falling all the time, so that I wondered how she could see what she was doing; but she gathered until her arms and her dress were full—she gathered every one! And when the bush was stripped of all but its green leaves I gave a little heart-broken cry—because they were Betty's roses, and she had so loved them when they were only hard little buds, and she looked down and saw me, and oh! her tears fell then, not like dew, but like rain.

“Betty,” she said, “kitty, Betty has gone—where—where there are roses—always!”

And she went slowly back to the house, with all my Betty's white roses heaped up in her arms. She never told me *where* my Betty had gone—no one did. And no more roses came out on the bush. I sat under it and watched because I hoped it would bloom again.

I sat there for hours and hours, and at last, while I was waiting, I saw something strange. People had been going in and out of the house all the morning. They kept coming and bringing flowers, and when they went away most of

them had tears in their eyes. And in the afternoon there were more than there had been in the morning. I had got so tired that I forgot and fell asleep. I don't know how long I slept, but I was awakened by hearing many footsteps going slowly down the garden walk towards the gate.

They all seemed to be people who were going away. And first there walked before them two men who were carrying a beautiful white and silver box of some kind on their shoulders. They moved very slowly, and their heads were bent as they walked. But the white and silver box was beautiful. It shone in the sun, and—oh, how my heart beat!—all my Betty's snow-white roses were heaped upon and wreathed around it. And I sat under the stripped rose-bush breaking my heart. She had gone away, my little Betty, and I did not know where, and all I could think was that this was the very last I should ever see of her, because I thought there must be something which had belonged to her in the white and silver box under the roses, and because she was gone they were carrying that away too.

Oh, my Betty, my Betty! And I am only a little cat, who sits by the fire and thinks, while nobody seems to care or understand how lonely and puzzled I am and how I long for some kind person to explain. And I could not bear it, but that we loved each other so much that it comforts me to think of it. And I loved her so much that when I say to

myself over and over again what her mamma said to me, it almost makes me happy again—almost—not quite, because I'm so lonely. But if it is true, even a little cat who loved her would be happy for her sake.

Betty has gone—where there are always roses. Betty has gone—where there are always roses.



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